

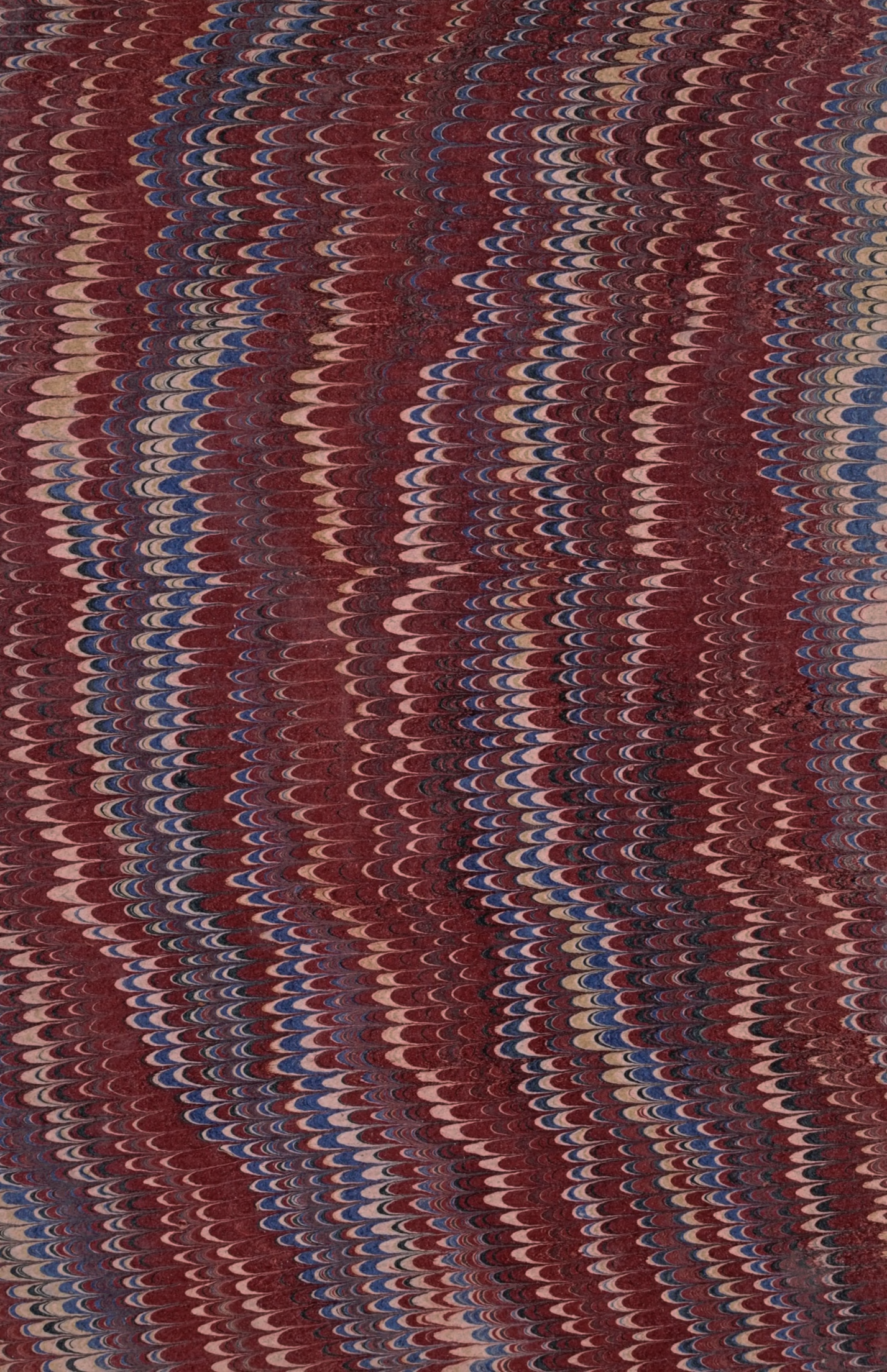


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SOCIAL METEOR



By
Clement R. Marley

NEW YORK
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS
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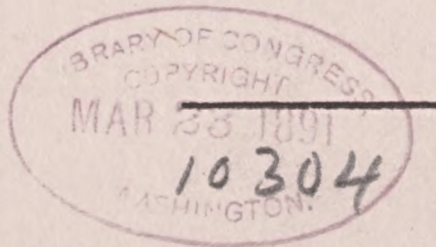
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A Social Meteor.

40
BY

CLEMENT R. MARLEY.



NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers.
31 Rose Street.

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A SOCIAL METEOR.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER OF INQUIRY.

PHILADELPHIA, November First.

DEAREST GEORGIE:—It is so long since I have either seen or heard from you that I am actually pining for a sight of your pretty face. So when can you accommodate me? We returned from Europe three weeks ago, and are now settled for the winter, I trust, for I am sick and tired of traveling, and long to potter around my own house once more.

This promises to be an unusually gay season here, and if you are as fond of “butterflying” (a word of my own) as you were before I went away, can I not prevail upon you to take pity upon a poor, unfortunate woman, whose husband positively refuses to accompany her on her “giddy rounds,” and come to us, for a month or so?

Don't write me that you are grieving over your late *affaire de cœur* and have given up society, *but come*; the sooner the better, and prepare to lose your heart all over again, to one of our “pet eligibles.”

Telegraph, if possible, when I may expect you,
and believe me always, Devotedly,
RAY THORNE.

Georgie Wheatley read this letter over twice, and then sat looking out of the window at the drizzling rain, with her hands clasped idly in her lap, and a thoughtful, almost sad expression on her face.

"How foolish I am," she said, finally, "how foolish I've been for a long time, and the sooner I turn over a new leaf, the better it will be for me. I ought to have more pride than to be spending my days in grieving after a man who probably never even thinks of me now, and yet that's exactly what I am doing. It's high time I turned my thoughts into a different channel if I hope ever to respect myself again."

She rose and went to the mirror, where she surveyed herself, languidly, from head to foot. The image reflected there would be satisfactory to most girls, and probably have brought a smile of contentment to their lips, but the serious expression did not leave her face, as she gazed.

"I'm a trifle thin and pale just now, and the corners of my mouth turn down, instead of up, as they should, but a change of air and scene will

help to remedy these defects. I think I'll go to Ray's. Anything will be better for me than sitting here, thinking, thinking all the time. And Aunt Margueret can spare me just now, she's so busy with her orphans, that she won't miss me very much. Yes, I'll go, for a little while, anyway."

And she went to her desk and scribbled off a few words on a telegraph blank, just as the bell for luncheon sounded.

Two days later she drove up to a fine house in Walnut street, Philadelphia, and was received with open arms by Mrs. Thorne as she entered the hall.

"I'm so delighted to see you, dear," she exclaimed, between her kisses, "you cannot imagine. But run up and take off your hat and jacket, and then come to my room, where we will make some tea *a la Russe*, which, I assure you, I can make to the queen's taste. I learned the art, on the other side, from a Russian nobleman. It will refresh you, for you look pale and tired."

When Georgie found herself seated in front of a crackling wood fire, in the daintiest of dressing-rooms, with the tea-kettle singing merrily on the hearth, and the light of the declining day coming

softly in between the heavy plush curtains, she felt distinctly better than she had for months.

"Your tea is certainly delicious, Ray," she said, as she placed her empty cup on the table. But she declined any more.

Her hostess had thrown herself into a low lounging-chair, and was toying with a tiny, long-eared dog which had crept into her lap. She was a pretty little woman of about twenty-eight, with a pair of soft brown eyes, and a mass of bright yellow hair. Her complexion was heightened by the least suspicion of rouge.

"Although it's months since I last saw you, cherie," she began, "you are as beautiful as ever, and no doubt are as busy breaking hearts as you were then. But why don't you marry? Can't you keep in love long enough? I'm afraid you're a little cruel, Georgie, if all accounts are true. I really pitied that poor Jack Nelson—he was so *awfully* 'gone'; and then to be thrown over just like the rest, after six months of your fascinating society. Ah, well," with a little sigh, "some day you may come across a man who will repay you for all this trifling of yours, and leave you to cry your pretty eyes out, while he rides gayly away. And Jack was so handsome, rich, and altogether

desirable; I *know* you would have been happy with him. Poor, poor fellow. I don't suppose there's any chance of your ever making up again, is there? I hear all sorts of stories about him."

"Oh, no; we'll never come together again," replied Georgie.

"Foolish little girl!" cried Mrs. Thorne. "Remember the story about the crooked stick. But after all, I suppose you know best, or think you do, and I'm not going to scold you. Only, as I say, it seems such a pity, as you were so well suited to each other. But to tell the truth, I never understood distinctly just what the trouble between you was. All sorts of rumors floated across the water to me. Suppose you rehearse your tale of 'severed hearts' to me, now, as it really happened. It won't pain you, will it? It's so long ago, and it would be only just to set me right regarding the details, you know. Pardon me if I smoke a cigarette—another thing I learned to do in Russia. Or will you join me?" she continued, taking one from a little silver case which hung by her side, and striking a match.

Georgie shook her head.

"Thanks, no," she answered. "I've never lived in Russia, but I do not dislike the odor."

"Good. Now for your story—every word, please. I'm deeply interested, and want to hear it all," said Ray, leaning back in her chair, while the dog, sickened by the smoke, retreated to the other side of the room.

"Don't ask me to go over it again, Ray," replied Georgie, pleadingly, "it's so old now, and I almost forget the 'details,' as you call them. I don't like to refer to it. Let's talk about something else, please, your visit to St. Petersburg, for instance."

"No," said Ray, "I can't possibly let you off, because I really am anxious to know what caused you to change your mind. I heard so many absurd reports. You quarreled, didn't you? I was told, among other things, that you demanded a settlement of twenty thousand to be made on your wedding-day, and he got angry, and called you a 'mercenary little wretch.' I didn't suppose there was any truth in that, knowing you as well as I do. You would never have made such a foolish blunder."

"No, that was as ridiculous as the rest," laughed Georgie. "We quarreled on account of jealousy, pure and simple."

"Ah, that's more like it. But go on—go on,

I don't want to drag every word out of you."

"It's a very commonplace story, I assure you. Still, if you insist——"

"I *do* insist, and remember what an old friend I am."

"Well, then, you know, for two months after I became engaged, I fairly lived in the clouds, for I loved Jack, and he was devoted to me. Besides, both families (that is, Aunt Margueret and his parents) approved so entirely of our marrying, and society in general thought it such an *excellent* idea, for me, with my money, to take him with his splendid prospects, just the thing, in fact. So our course of true love promised to run very smooth indeed."

"Yes, it was a case of 'beauty and the boodle,' as Charley said, when we first heard of it," interrupted Mrs. Thorne.

"He didn't restrict me in any way, and was so attentive—I had only to express a wish, and it was gratified; he loaded me with the most beautiful presents, you remember some of them, perhaps. I often used to tell him that there would be nothing left to give me when we were married, but he always laughed, and said I would find something to long for, or I was no woman.

"He allowed me to have as many men come to see me as before our engagement, and was never sulky when he found callers at the house, even on his especial evenings."

"What bliss," exclaimed Ray, "what on earth did you find to quarrel about?"

"You'll soon hear. At last, about three months before we were to have been married, a certain young Scotchman began to come to the house with one of Jack's especial friends. He seemed to be a very nice little fellow, and every one liked him—except Jack; he took a violent dislike to him almost immediately. Why it was, though, I never could find out, exactly. He said he was 'airish,' 'snobbish,' and a 'lady-killer,' which I thought very unjust, and one day I told him so, pretty frankly. Then he got angry and said that perhaps he was a better judge of men than I was, and that he could see no reason why I should wish to have that little 'bull-dog' trotting after me all the time. I told him I was perfectly indifferent as to whether Mr. St. John ever called on me again or not, only I thought he was acting foolishly to be jealous of the poor little fellow, who was in this country all alone, and who didn't call on me oftener than any one else.

"Then he got perfectly furious, and said, in the ugliest tone I had ever heard him use :

"Possibly *I am* foolish, but at any rate, I'm determined upon one thing, and that is, either that man stops coming here, or I do. Take your choice.'

"I looked at him to see if he was in earnest, his whole manner was so unlike Jack's, and then, satisfied that he meant what he said, I drew myself up, and said, as coldly as I could :

"You may leave the house at any time you may see fit, but unless you can give me a good reason why I should not see Mr. St. John when he comes to call like any one else, I decline to shut the door in his face. He visits your own house, why don't you keep him out of that? Certainly you ought to be able to control things there, better than here, *yet*. When your mother refuses to receive him I will do the same, but not until then.'

"Without another word, and with his face scarlet with passion, he took his hat and left, and the following morning he sent me a note saying that 'it was evident, from my treatment of him the day before, that my regard for him was very small, so in that case he thought we had better part.'

Until then I had hoped he would sleep off his anger and write me a penitent letter, but this staggered me."

"The prig!" ejaculated Ray.

"My maid said the man was waiting at the door for an answer, and knowing that I must show something of my state of mind in my face, I told her to go down stairs and tell him I would send it.

"Then I flew to my bureau and gathered together all the things Jack had ever given me, excepting one little ring, and made them hastily into a package, and after a few tears—just a few, for it seemed like parting with old friends—I sent them to him with a note. He had given me a dog, 'Snap,' you remember, but I was too much attached to the little animal to give *him* back, and fortunately he didn't ask for him.

"That evening I danced at a ball, but my face was as white as my dress, and my heart was aching cruelly; still, I was too proud to give up, and I kept laughing and chatting incessantly, so that no one could get a chance to remark upon Jack's absence, to me. The next day I heard that he had gone to Washington, where he staid two or three weeks. Then the tongues began to

wag, and in two days' time everybody had some kind of a story to tell about the affair, and it's needless, perhaps, to assure you that none of them contained a grain of truth, and scarcely any two were alike. But I kept my lips tight together and let them talk, much to the despair of some of the old gossips, who actually had the audacity to call at the house, or write to me, asking what the real reason for our separation was. Of course, I paid no attention to these impertinences, and even poor, dear old Aunt Margueret heard very little from me, and, as is sometimes the case, she questioned me less than anybody, but thoughtfully left me to myself for weeks, to 'live it down,' as she expressed it. She allowed those people only to see me who she knew would tend to take my mind off my trouble, and not seek to gratify an idle curiosity, and in this way my grief before a great while gave place to a feeling that my ex-fiance had treated me very shabbily, and that he wasn't worth regretting.

"Strange to say, as soon as he returned, he came directly to me and begged me to make it up with him, and renew our engagement. But then it was *my* turn, and much as I knew I loved him, even yet, I felt that he had behaved too

badly to be forgiven at once. So I told him I wouldn't promise anything for a year. Of course he pleaded with me and said he could not live without me, etc., etc., but I was firm, and told him that even if I was willing to take him back immediately, Aunt Margueret would not consent to it, as she was very much disgusted with him. So he agreed to wait.

"Well, to make a long story a little shorter, we met after this, quite frequently, at the house of a mutual friend of ours, and pretty soon I found myself looking forward to the end of that year with as much eagerness as if I had not imposed the probation myself. But"—hurriedly—"you know how unsatisfactory arrangements of that kind are apt to be; we could not meet openly, and other men, not knowing the state of affairs, began to pay me attention, which caused more trouble between us, and so, we have gradually drifted apart. It's a year now since I have even seen him."

Her last sentence was delivered slowly, and with her eyes fixed on the fire.

Ray leaned toward her.

"Do you love him still, in spite of all?" she asked, softly.

Georgie turned quickly, and looking her friend calmly in the face, replied, coldly :

"I have no other feeling for him now, than one of utter contempt. At first, when he began to neglect me after our reconciliation, I think I hated him, and I know I hated myself for being weak enough to listen to his excuses and meekly submit to his fault-finding when other men dared to send me bouquets, or take me to the play, but after that my heart seemed to gradually freeze up, and now I don't think I should be moved if I were to hear that he was dead—or married.

"What fools we women are, anyway," she continued, clasping her knee with her hands, and with her gaze still on the fire. "We lie down and let a man trample on us, when we love him, and then, instead of looking for it as a natural result, we are surprised when he leaves us and seeks 'green fields.' It's a strange world, isn't it? And we all need experience to knock a little common sense into our heads. Well, I've had my lesson; no other man shall have the opportunity of making a fool of me. I'm beginning to believe that the less one permits one's self to feel, the better off one is. It doesn't seem to be of any use to be patient or faithful; every one

laughs at, or worse still, pities you. It only pays to amuse one's self."

"Wisely spoken, *ma chere*," nodded Ray, blowing a cloud of smoke into the air and watching it fade away. "The world, or rather the people in it, *are* a queer lot, and the sooner we learn to live only for our own selfish gratification, the better off we are. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you' is just as true to-day as it was a hundred years ago, and will be a hundred years hence. The time has gone by when women wait upon their lords' pleasure like penny dogs. And why? Because that sort of thing isn't appreciated any more. Men run after women nowadays who will amuse and flatter them, and the ones who lack originality may just as well make up their minds first, as last, to go to the wall. Trample upon every one who stands between you and your desires, is the motto of to-day; only do it with a smiling face, so that no one will believe you are cruel.

"People may frown upon a woman who goes to greater lengths to attract men than they consider 'nice'; but what of it? In spite of them she flourishes. She is the one around whom all the men crowd in the ball-room, and it is she whom

they invite to their 'select dinners' and champagne suppers, while her demure sisters stay at home and talk. You see blushes have given place to rouge, and the *spirituelle* to the *chic*. I don't say it's right; I only state a fact, and such as it is, every mondaine is bound to observe it, if she wishes to succeed. Yes, it is a strange place, and yet a woman, if she knows a thing or two, can have a good time in it. She can eat her own cake, and get that of most people, as well, if she only asks for it prettily, and eats it daintily, without soiling her fingers, or getting laughed at for being clumsy."

She paused a moment, and then continued, more gently:

"But, I don't mean to say that there aren't exceptions to this rule, for I certainly believe that there are men who can appreciate devotion and sincerity on the part of a woman, and who can never supply the place of a lost loved one—only I haven't come across any yet. And your Jack may be of this character. He may come back to you again, penitent and adoring, I don't know. I can form no idea of what took him away, to begin with. He surely could not have tired of you—he would be a fool in that case. But

men are so easily bored nowadays (especially with devotion), that one never can tell; their tastes are vitiated; they like change; and we should be prepared to follow suit the moment they begin to show signs of 'falling off.' Remember the old saw about the 'fish in the sea,' and live up to it.

"Forgive this long speech, my dear, and don't think me heartless. But I am older than you are, and am only telling you what *my* experience has been. If you haven't lived long enough to see as I do, forget every word I've spoken; but if you are willing to be guided by me a little, and so save yourself lots of trouble, begin by banishing the cause of your late unhappiness from your mind and let us see what we can do for you here."

"I told you I had banished him from my mind," replied Georgie.

"And you never think of him now?"

"No."

"Jamais?"—half doubtingly.

"Jamais," decidedly. "I have put him aside as I did my dolls when I outgrew them."

"I put my dolls away too, in a dark closet, and forgot all about them," pursued Ray; "but last year, when I was staying at mamma's, I accident-

ally came across one I used to call 'Dottie,' and would you believe it? all the old affection for her came back to me. I took her in my arms and cried over her, actually."

"Was she in good condition?" asked Georgie, quickly.

"Mercy, no! She was dreadfully dilapidated; she had only one arm, no legs, and if I remember correctly, one side of her face was smashed in, poor dear. Her curls, too—those lovely golden ringlets which had been my pride and delight—were quite moth-eaten. And yet I had loved her so that even then, grown woman that I was, I could not help being moved by the sight of her."

"And therein lies the difference between 'Dottie' and Jack," answered Georgie; "she was your companion, until you discarded her, and then, when you found her again, she may have been battered out of all recognition, but it was by your childish hands. One half of her face may have been gone, but the other half smiled at you just as tenderly as ever, did it not? Jack left me voluntarily, without the slightest reason that I ever could discover, and I never wish to see him again. Yet, I dare say, if he were in trouble and called on me to aid him I would not refuse. That sounds weak,

doesn't it? But I could not help it. I loved him once, and although that love is dead, I will always have a feeling for him which I could not explain—a sort of—of——”

“I know, a sort of a *‘je ne sais quoi,’*” finished Ray, energetically. “But wait, my dear,” she went on, “until you’ve seen some of our men. I don’t mean to be conceited, but I flatter myself we’ve got some very nice ones here.”

Georgie shook her head, smilingly.

“I don’t doubt that in the least,” she conceded, “but nevertheless, I’d rather you wouldn’t make up your mind to pair me off with any of them, for you would only be disappointed.”

“I don’t think I would,” returned Ray. “Once I make up my mind to do a thing I generally do it. But don’t be frightened, sweetheart, I won’t disgust you by throwing any of our ‘catches’ at your head. Far from it. Whatever plans I lay for your future happiness I shall keep to myself, and you won’t know anything about it until you’re trapped.”

CHAPTER II.

READING CHARACTERS.

The following day Mrs. Thorne gave a large dinner party to her most intimate friends in honor of her guest.

"I'm going to seat you next to a man to-night whom half the girls in town are after," she said, as she gave the finishing touches to Georgie's toilet just before they went down stairs, "and my opinion is, that he will be very hard to please if he does not fall in love with you at first sight," and she looked admiringly at the slight, graceful figure beside her.

Georgie was dressed in a light blue gown, of some delicate, fleecy material, embroidered with silver, which swept far behind her on the carpet. Her neck and arms were bare, and her dark hair was gathered in a Grecian knot at the back of her shapely head. There was an unusual color in her cheeks, and a bright sparkle in her eyes, due no doubt to the exertion of dressing.

She had seen her twenty-second birthday, but she looked fully five years younger, as she stood beside her hostess laughing and chatting. Her

movements were quick and graceful and her voice had the merry, frank ring of a child's.

"Lee is late, as usual," remarked Ray, a little pettishly when the hands of the clock pointed to five minutes after eight. - "The dinner will be ruined in a little while and it always provokes Charley so, to keep him waiting. Ah, here he comes, at last," as a tall, fine-looking man entered the room and came toward them. "We were just wondering if you would be unkind enough to disappoint us this evening." Then turning to her companion, "Georgie, my dear, permit me to introduce Mr. Grant. I expect you and Miss Wheatley to be great friends, Lee."

Mr. Grant was a large, well-shaped man of about thirty-five, with strength stamped on every line of his face and figure. His features, though a trifle too heavy for perfect beauty, perhaps, were good in outline, and refined, particularly his mouth. He was clean-shaven, and when he smiled, showed to advantage a set of splendid teeth.

After a little conversation Georgie decided that she was going to like him, and she certainly considered him one of the most striking-looking men she had ever seen. He possessed a peculiar charm

of manner which few women could resist, and this she soon discovered.

A few moments later the dining-room doors were thrown open and dinner was announced. Everything had an air of profuse, open-handed hospitality and showed that the host and hostess intended to regale their guests royally.

A crystal chandelier threw its soft light over everything, and a faint odor of violets pervaded the room. There was a dainty rustle of silks and laces as the ladies took their seats.

It was evident before long that Mr. Grant was very much attracted by his fair neighbor, and as the evening advanced, this favorable impression seemed to deepen, for he had eyes for no one else.

He tried to illustrate to her the advantages club life in Philadelphia possessed over club life in other parts of the world; he gave her descriptions of the winter sports there; of his horses and dogs; everything and anything, looking at her all the time, with admiration written on every line of his face.

Georgie, on her part, appeared to be pleased with his attentions, and although she now and then made a remark to her right hand neighbor,

a young naval officer named Alexander, most of her conversation was addressed to Mr. Grant, and in a short time they began to feel like old friends.

Lee was full of plans for amusements to be carried out during her stay in town.

"Now I think a drive to C—, about an hour out by the straight road, would not be a bad idea," he said as he cracked her almonds at dessert. "We could go on my drag and get there in time for luncheon and be back again before sundown. Almost any day convenient for you would suit me, that is, if you would like to go."

"Oh, I should enjoy it above all things," she replied, "if Ray can only arrange it."

"I think we can count upon Mrs. Thorne," returned Lee, "for she is very fond of driving four-in-hand."

And so it turned out, for Ray expressed herself as not only willing, but eager to go, and insisted upon at once making up a little party to accompany them, and setting the day.

The following Thursday was agreed upon, and it dawned bright and clear. They set out about eleven o'clock, Lee occupying the box-seat with Miss Wheatley beside him.

As they drove along Georgie felt her spirits gradually rising, in this genial company, and before they had finished the first mile she had cast all sad thoughts behind her and was positively gay. She must, indeed, have been of a very gloomy temperament, had she not been influenced by her present surroundings. Everybody was merry, and she herself occupied the seat of honor, beside the driver, who every little while looked down at her, in that tender, protecting fashion, which is so natural to men of the world. They arrived at their destination, a comfortable looking country hotel, about noon, and lost no time in attacking the delicious lunch awaiting them.

"No doubt these chickens were taking their last cackle, as we came around the turn," remarked Archie Young, the self-elected wit of the party, as he plunged the carving fork into the breast of a steaming fowl. There was a chorus of "ohs" from the ladies at this rather questionable speech, but it did not seem to impair their appetites, for their drive in the crisp, chilly air had made them very hungry, and they did full justice to everything set before them. The meal was served in a private parlor, and by Mr. Grant's

own men, so they laughed and chatted as much and as loudly as they chose, without the fear of being criticised by outsiders. The popping of the champagne corks made an excellent accompaniment for the bright sparkling laughter which went round the table. It certainly was a jolly party, and Ray had shown much tact in her selection of individuals, for there apparently was not an unsociable one among them.

When they had finished, the ladies gathered around the big old fashioned fire-place, and told stories or repeated stray bits of gossip while the men strolled off to look at the horses or have a game of billiards.

Toward the end of the afternoon some one produced a pack of cards and proposed poker, which suggestion was met by four or five, with instant and loud approval. So a small table was cleared, and with beans in lieu of chips, the game was commenced.

Ray, rather to Georgie's surprise, took a hand, and at first luck favored her singularly; she seemed unable to lose, though she made the most daring draws.

"I shall certainly pity you, my poor Clarence, when you have to cash all these miserable little

beans," she cried merrily, to the banker, picking up a handful and letting them fall noisily back into her lap.

"They represent many a good dollar. I shall be able to treat myself to something very nice if this continues." But it did not continue; she soon began to lose, and before long was reduced to her last cent. Then she bought more with the same result; they seemed to fairly melt away. She was in despair, and finally resorted to all the silly little tricks so universally believed in by superstitious players as a means to tempt the goddess of fortune, but all in vain. Luck had deserted her.

Pretty soon an ugly frown appeared on her forehead and an angry flush dyed her cheeks.

The climax was reached, however, when Mrs. Wolcott, one of her most intimate friends, laughingly accused her of holding six cards at once. She sprang up from the table in a rage and threw down her hand, crying that she would no longer play with such a "pack of cheats."

It took the combined efforts of all the party to smooth her ruffled plumage and convince her that none of them had believed for an instant, that she had intended to deal unfairly. But

when she *was* restored to good humor she smiled sweetly on everybody, and showed plainly that she bore no malice toward any one.

When the horses came around to the door Ray acted as if she would like to occupy the box-seat, going home, but before she could express herself to that effect, Lee had swung Georgie into it, and helped her up to the one behind.

They started off amid the barking of dogs, and the kindly "good-bys" of the hotel-keeper and his buxom wife, who stood in the door-way waving napkins after them until they were out of sight around the corner.

It had grown chilly since noon, and wraps were in demand.

A sharp wind had risen, and the sun had that cold, blurred appearance which it sometimes assumes in late fall. The flinty roads rang out loud and clear under the hoof-beats of the horses as they dashed along by field and grove, and now and then a flock of sheep, huddling instinctively together in an open barn-yard, gazed at them with frightened eyes, or uttered melancholy bleats, as they passed, followed by clouds of dust. The tall shocks of corn standing brown and stiff,

in the midst of the bare fields, looked like monuments raised to the dead summer.

Lee was at first obliged to give his entire attention to the horses, which, knowing that their noses were pointed toward home, were pulling with unusual vigor.

When he had succeeded in calming them down somewhat, he turned to Georgie, and after tucking the lap robe well around her, asked her if she had enjoyed herself.

"It has been one of the jolliest days I ever spent," she answered. "Everything turned out well and every one seemed to be so happy."

"About the only disagreeable feature of the day was the little tiff between Mrs. Thorne and Mrs. Wolcott, during that game of cards," said he, "but fortunately it did not amount to much. Mrs. Thorne got angry and said some things which made a bad feeling for a little while, but it soon blew over, and won't be remembered against her by any one. They all know her, and always make allowances for her little peculiarities. Still, such misunderstandings are very unpleasant, and often make no end of trouble. I didn't approve of the cards in the first place to-day, and begged two or three of the fellows not to propose any

kind of a game for money, for when people play in a hurry they cannot keep their wits about them. Now Mrs. Thorne isn't the best hand at poker in the world, and yet she's wild over it, especially when she is winning. But when luck is against her she sometimes gets—well, almost snappish, as you saw to-day."

"I know she does," replied Georgie; "she always was quick-tempered. Even as a child I remember she usually made a pretty desperate struggle for her own way."

"And if she did not get it she would cry, eh?" asked Lee.

"Yes, generally," replied Georgie, smiling, "and I've known her to scratch or bite, occasionally."

"Well, she does that still, only her nails are longer now and make deeper wounds," observed Lee.

"She does not mean any harm by it, for she's the most generous, whole-souled woman I ever knew," returned Georgie.

"Perhaps not. But at the same time she ought to try to exercise some kind of control over herself," declared Lee; "as a general thing her own friends will give in, as I say, rather than have a

fuss with her, and be struck off her visiting list or left out of her entertainments. But once in a while she comes across a person who is willing to 'fight it out' with her, and then the fur flies, I tell you."

"Yes, I can imagine it," said Georgie. "It certainly is a great pity she doesn't try to overcome such a serious fault, for her own sake; it must give people, who don't know her, a very bad opinion of her."

"It does. But she doesn't stop to think of that; willful people seldom do. The worst of it is," Lee went on, "that it makes no difference where she is; if she thinks she has reason to be angry, she flies right out into a terrible passion and abuses the offender roundly, perfectly indifferent as to who may be listening to her."

"Well, that's her only bad fault," answered Georgie, stanchly.

Lee shrugged his shoulders and snapped his whip over the head of one of the leaders as he made a sudden plunge, before he spoke again. Then he said:

"Well, it's a dused nasty one, and it wouldn't be tolerated if she had less money or position.

As it is, she can do pretty nearly as she likes, and she knows it."

"Oh, no, I'm sure you're mistaken," uttered Georgie. "People would love her for herself, for she's certainly one of the brightest little creatures I ever saw and can do things no one else would dare to do. She reminds me of a beautiful butterfly."

"Or a bee with a good-sized sting."

She laughed.

"Well," he continued, "I suppose it isn't in very good taste for me to speak of the faults of your hostess and my guest, to you, for she's very charming notwithstanding, and I wouldn't have done it, had she not made trouble to-day. I was a little put out, so please pardon me. But," in a different tone, "what do you think of these people?"

"They seem very nice, and are certainly very jolly," replied Georgie.

"Yes, they *are* jolly," said Lee, "but they go everywhere and every one likes them. They are Mrs. Thorne's particular set, you know, and when she's with them she does and says about what she pleases. I believe that is the reason she likes them so much."

"Well, Ray never could endure monotony," returned Georgie, "and since her return from the other side she seems to be fonder of life than ever. She's always on the go. Living in Europe has given her some rather queer ideas, I think."

"Yes, I know them," remarked Lee, nodding his head. "They're enough to knock the romance out of any young person. She ought to keep them to herself. Talk is cheap, and like other valueless articles often does harm. I hope you were not influenced by her sentiments. She is a thorough woman of the world, and her knowledge of it is no doubt the cause of her peculiar views. She has learned to trust very little that she sees. We all get skeptical as we grow older, it's perfectly natural, and our childish trust in each other vanishes after a few hard hits. But I don't see the use of opening other people's eyes to the wickedness of the world; I think it's a mistaken kindness, for that's one of the things, it seems to me, which it is better to find out for ourselves. Heaven knows we all do it soon enough. As for you, though," smiling down at her, "I don't think you'll need the benefit of anybody's experience; you'll profit by your own,

from day to day, and not become either discouraged or hardened."

"What do you mean? Have you formed an idea of my character already?" asked Georgie.

"A little," he answered, frankly.

"Well, and what have you discovered?"

"One or two things."

"What are they?"

"First, that you're rather reserved, and unlike most women, generally think before you speak."

"I am 'cold and calculating' then?" she laughed.

"Not at all. I think you're capable of a good deal of feeling, but would be able to conceal it, if you thought best. In other words, you don't wear your heart on your sleeve."

"You believe I could have a sorrow at heart and no one suspect it?" inquired Georgie.

"I think so—yes, you have a romantic face and the most wonderful eyes I ever saw, so deep and clear. I can imagine them shedding tears in the privacy of your own room, or lighting up with love, but never blazing with passion."

"And yet, I've a fine temper of my own," observed Georgie.

"Possibly," admitted Lee, "but you wouldn't

show your anger in your eyes; they would merely take a grieved expression."

"What nonsense; but go on; what else do you think about me?"

"Well," he continued, "I believe you could mix with gay society like this crowd, for instance, all your life, and not get to be like them. You're too level headed."

"Oh, you're very flattering, and perhaps you're mistaken," she replied. "I don't approve of all I've seen done to-day, but I cannot say I see any great harm in it either. They only try to kill time when they find it hangs heavy on their hands. I never have cared to play cards, for instance, but it isn't because I disapprove of them. Now if I was suffering from *ennui* as Ray and her friends claim to do, so often, I might do as they do too."

He shook his head thoughtfully.

"I hope you'll never be tempted," he said, earnestly. "A taste for gambling or for stimulants in a man is bad enough, but I should *hate* to see a woman I cared for and respected having recourse to them to kill time."

Just then a gay voice behind them called out: "Listen, you two. It has been proposed by our

good friend Mrs. Reed here that we dine with her to-night instead of at our respective homes. How does the suggestion strike you?"

It struck them favorably, and in a few minutes they were rattling down Walnut street.

CHAPTER III.

TAKEN BY STORM.

Mrs. Thorne had just returned from her morning ride in the park. She had enjoyed herself highly, and now, flushed and rosy from the exhilarating exercise, she was about to sit down to a light luncheon in her own room before taking her usual nap.

She was passionately fond of riding. Of an indolent and idle temperament naturally, she would rise at any hour, in any weather, to take a gallop with some congenial friend. But she would never go alone, declaring that she could not endure her own society for so long a time.

She found her chop delicious and her eggs, *a la Turc*, exactly to her taste. Annette was just laying out the loose gown in which madam generally took her siesta when Joseph, the butler, rapped at the door.

"What can the stupid fellow want?" exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, crossly. "He knows well enough

he isn't to disturb me at this hour. But see what he's after, Annette."

"He says Mr. Grant is down stairs, madam," answered the girl, a moment later, "and would like to see you."

"Oh, bother! What a nuisance—and I'm frightfully tired, too. However, tell him I'll be there presently."

She looked in the glass two or three times to make sure that she was presentable, and then ran lightly down the stairs.

"Good-morning, Lee," she said. "You'll excuse my appearing in my habit, I hope, but I just got in from my ride, and hadn't time to change it."

"You look as charming as usual," returned Lee. "But I am afraid I disturbed you—you take a nap at this hour, don't you?"

"Yes, but there's plenty of time for that. Sit down, and we can have a little chat. Pray where have you been keeping yourself—I haven't seen you since Thursday and this is Monday?"

"I only got back from New York this morning; I've been spending Sunday with Jimmy French. But really, I wouldn't interfere with your 'beauty sleep' for anything in the world. In fact, I only

stepped in to find out if you and Miss Wheatley are going to Mrs. Lindley's reception this afternoon. I thought if you were she might enjoy a little drive through the park first."

"Oh, I *know* she'll be delighted," replied Mrs. Thorne, "only, unfortunately, she's quite ill with a headache. She's been suffering all the morning, and I believe she's asleep now; still, I'll send right up stairs and see if she feels equal to dressing."

"Indeed, I won't hear of your doing anything of the kind," answered Lee, earnestly. "Let her rest, and I'll call again to-morrow. I don't suppose she'll go to the reception then?"

"I hardly think she will. You see, she's been on the go so much since she's been with us that she's fairly worn out, I do believe."

"I haven't a doubt of it. Everybody is singing her praise, and half the fellows at the club have lost their hearts already."

"Ah!"

This exclamation was delivered in a quizzical tone, and accompanied by a comical little side glance.

"Yes, I assure you, Ray, your visitor has brought you in splendid returns, if appreciation

can be called by such a name. She has actually made a sensation here in this critical old town."

"That is gratifying, I am sure. But tell me, is there any one particularly smitten, as far as you know? Any one worth while, I mean."

"Oh, yes, several. Jasper Hughes is horribly gone, and poor little Valie Beech glares at any man who dares to ask her to dance. I saw him standing in the door-way at Mrs. Foster's last week, twisting his mustache and looking daggers at young Bellman, when she favored him in the cotillon. Afterward he went out, and you never heard such uncomplimentary names as he called poor Bellman. It was really very amusing."

"Good!" laughed Ray. "I thought she would take."

"Well, she has—taken by storm."

"What a melancholy tone, my boy! Come now, tell me. What do you think of her?"

"That she's charming, of course."

"Only that! Aren't you *un peu epris*?" pursued Mrs. Thorne gayly, "as well as the others?"

"Do you suppose I'm such a fool!" said Lee, seriously, "as to sow where there is not the least chance of my ever reaping? Oh, no. I've lived a few too many years for that. I have learned to

admire at a distance without coveting; to be able to look and not to touch."

Mrs. Thorne sprang up suddenly, with an energy quite unusual to her.

"Well, as true as I live!" she exclaimed. "I do believe you are falling in love with her."

"I assure you, Ray, you were never more mistaken in your life. I——"

She interrupted him by placing both hands on his shoulders and forcing him to meet her merry eyes.

"Look here, Lee," she said, "remember how many years I've had the pleasure of your acquaintance—how often you've confided in me before now; tell me whether I haven't always advised you to the best of my ability, and then answer one question. Aren't you ashamed of yourself for trying to deceive me with a wicked fib like that? Pshaw! I thought you had more principle."

"At least give me credit for a little sense, Ray," retorted Lee, almost angrily. "Am I, do you think, the sort of man to succumb to any woman, after seeing her only a dozen times? I like and admire Miss Wheatly immensely, I acknowledge,

my dear little woman, but love is too serious a feeling to be talked of so lightly."

"Love is delightful," observed Ray, with the air of a sage, "and 'comes like a summer sigh.'"

"Much you know about it, you pious little fraud! Certainly the sentiments you entertain toward that precious husband of yours can scarcely be dignified by so sacred a name."

"No, it's true my 'better half' is scarcely the sort of person to inspire the *grande passion*, but I can imagine what it must be like. Ah, I am sure it is bliss."

"No doubt, and yet it causes a sight of unhappiness, sometimes. But joking aside, Ray, is there any one in whom Miss Wheatley is particularly interested just now?"

"I thought you'd come around. Do you really wish to know? Well, then, I'll tell you what I honestly think. I *think* she fancies you much more than she does any one she has met here."

Mr. Grant's whole face lighted up with pleasure, but he was blissfully unconscious of the fact.

"But how about anywhere else? I heard——"

"Yes, no doubt you heard all about her recent engagement. Disagreeable news travels fast. Who told you? Some one, I'll warrant, who did

not hesitate to embellish the story. Still, I'll tell you ; you may make your mind easy on *that score*. *Cette affaire est finie*, and she is perfectly heart whole once more."

"And yet a woman with a past——" began Lee, musingly.

"Oh, so you are thinking seriously of her, are you ?" interrupted Ray, mischievously, with a side glance at him. "Well, actually, I'm delighted ; I mean to turn match-maker ; it will be lots of fun for me, and give me an object in life. Something I haven't had, by the way, for an age."

"I was merely going to say," resumed Lee, "that a woman with a past seldom makes a desirable wife."

"*Au contraire, mon cher*," replied Ray, quickly. "She makes the very best ; she knows how to treat you better than an *ingenue* would, and she is not half so apt to be fickle. Oh, I know you will suit each other admirably, and how I shall scheme and work to throw you together ! Dear me, it's time you were married, anyway, Lee, you must be nearly thirty-five, and the first thing we know you will be snatched up bodily by some designing widow or old maid, and society will be left to mourn its loss. So I am going to take you

in hand and see that you are properly settled, and upon my word I believe Georgie is just the girl for you."

"Don't make too many plans, or I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in the end," uttered Lee, laughingly.

"No, I shall not. Why should I? You're as handsome a man as one sees in a month of Sundays, and you know how attractive she is without my telling you. And then, *mon cher*, think of the attraction of your worldly goods."

"Lee's expression changed suddenly.

"If I thought," said he, "that what I possess would be the least factor in the case I should not take the trouble to walk across the room to speak to her."

"That would make no difference with Georgie," exclaimed Ray, hastily, seeing her mistake; "she's not like most girls, and besides you must recollect that she's ridiculously rich herself, so money would be 'no object' to her."

"I'd forgotten that. But, to change the subject, what time are you going to Mrs. Lindley's?"

"About six."

"Then I shall see you there."

"Yes. I'm so sorry Georgie won't be able to

go. But come to dinner to-morrow; it's my day home, you know, and perhaps, if you're *very* good, I may manage to let you see her alone for a half-hour or so during the evening."

Lee grasped her hand, murmuring his thanks.

"*Pas du tout*," she said, coolly. "I shall enjoy managing a *tete-a-tete* almost as much as you will taking part in it. But now let me give you some instructions. To begin with, she must not suspect, for an instant, that I know anything about the state of your feelings toward her. Let her find that out naturally; it will be much better so. Be careful what you do, and for heaven's sake don't be rash. Don't let her read your intentions in those big, honest eyes of yours, nor let her lose interest in you by seeing you dancing attendance upon some other girl. Consider always how you can best please her, without letting her see your object, and this you will find no easy task, for she is a remarkably bright young woman. Be always at her service, and yet never obtrusive. Adore her, if you like, but don't tell her about it at present. Follow my instructions, and time and I will do the rest. Must you go so soon? Well, I shall see you in the crush. Stay a moment, though. Send her some flowers to-day, and a box of bon-

bons to-morrow ; she'll be well enough to eat them then, and to think of you besides. And don't forget to have plenty of marrons put in, for I am devoted to them."

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGIE SHOCKED.

That night, after dinner, Ray went up-stairs to Georgie's room. She found her dressed and lying on a sofa, with a tray full of tea and toast on a chair beside her.

"So glad you're feeling better this evening, dearie," she said, cordially. "But can't you eat something? Tea and toast. Bless my soul, what trash! It makes me sick to look at it. Won't you have something nourishing? A little piece of chicken, or beefsteak? Do, now; you won't get out in a week if you try to live on such stuff as this."

"I couldn't touch another thing, really," replied Georgie. "I'm not usually troubled with loss of appetite, but my head has been aching frightfully all the afternoon, and anything substantial would make me worse again, I know. But tell me about the reception; was it nice? And whom did you see that I know?"

"It was delightful, and everybody was there," answered Ray. "Mrs. Lindley wore yellow. Just imagine, with her leathery hide. And those two

old-maid daughters of hers were standing beside her in baby-pink and light-blue, looking exactly like half-fledged chickens, with their great long arms and scrawny necks. They're all such frights. And yet the younger one, who affects the English drawl, 'don't you know,' had the greatest lot of little dudes hanging around her. It's her money, I suppose, for it certainly isn't her beauty. She looked scared to death all the time she was receiving. But, as I say, it was very pleasant, and ever so many people asked after you, and were dreadfully sorry to hear you were ill."

"I wish I could have gone. Were the Mortons there?"

"Yes, he was wandering around, alone as usual, while she was sitting on the stairs, tucking away champagne with a crowd of half-grown boys."

"And Peter Persuade—you saw him?"

"Of course," replied Ray. "He goes everywhere. Do you know I think he's a perfect study, that fellow, and what a rocking walk he has, like a vessel in a gale. I shall never forget him the night he was usher at Stella Campbell's

wedding—see-sawing up the aisle, with his bald head shining like a billiard-ball.”

“But you like him, don’t you?” asked Georgie, quickly.

“Certainly. Who doesn’t? He’s such excellent company, always has the latest scandal, and tells it so well. There’s nothing he so thoroughly enjoys as talking about the time when he had ‘loads of money,’ and what he would do if he had it now.”

“You know he went through with his father’s and grandfather’s fortunes in less than no time.”

“I know, and is waiting for another. But it must be at least half a million, he says, for he wouldn’t thank any one to leave him less, as it would only aggravate him.”

“Yes, he’s a character. But what is his latest?”

“His latest? Let me see if I remember,” said Ray, thoughtfully.

“Oh, yes; he talks about ‘me butler,’ ‘me valet,’ ‘me coachman,’ in the most pretentious way.”

“How absurd! But every one understands him.”

“Every one, and there isn’t another just like him in the world, I’ll wager.”

"No, I don't believe there is. He's the only one of his kind to be found anywhere. Sometimes he becomes a little tiresome, though, don't you think so?"

"Not to me. I love to listen to his chatter, and he never bores me," declared Ray.

"Did you see Mr. Fanning, the widower?"

"No, but his daughter was there, looking as much like a butter-tub as usual. I don't see how so handsome a man could have a child so unlike him. She's really too disgusting. She was receiving, too, and wore a white tulle dress with an enormous wreath of roses around her neck. She looked exactly like a garlanded ox."

"She *is* homely," observed Georgie, languidly.

"No, she isn't; she's simply confoundedly plain. I could forgive her if she was out and out ugly, but as it is, all you can say about her is, that she's fat. Her face would be rather pretty if she hadn't three distinct chins. But you haven't asked after Lee."

"No; I suppose he was there," replied Georgie.

"To be sure," said Ray, "and he asked most particularly after you. I thought he was going to cry when I told him you were ill, he looked so

distressed. He rushed right out after some flowers to send you."

"That was very nice of him," said Georgie. "I shall have to write him a pretty little note when they come."

"He's about as big a conquest as you've ever made, isn't he?" asked Ray, suddenly, smoothing out an imaginary wrinkle in her skirt.

The color rose to Georgie's cheek as she answered, a little coldly:

"What nonsense, Ray! A man whom I've known only a few weeks. Be sensible."

"I am sensible; enough so, at any rate, to believe that he's decidedly smitten with you," retorted Ray, "and that you've only to play your cards right to have him at your feet."

But Georgie had turned her face to the wall and disdained to reply.

Just then a knock came at the door and the flowers were handed in.

Glad of an occupation, Ray untied the box and proceeded to arrange them in a bunch.

"He's the biggest catch in town," she resumed, "and a man any woman might be proud to march up to the altar with. Why, half the girls here would jump down his throat at a word of encour-

agement from him. But evidently he prefers you and if I were in your place I would drop him a little courtesy and say 'yes, and thank you kindly, sir,' if he asked me."

"What's the use of talking about such a thing?" exclaimed Georgie, impatiently. "You know I never intend to marry. My first experience in that line was not so pleasant that I should wish to repeat it."

Ray dropped the flowers in astonishment.

"Name of a china cup," she exclaimed; "do you mean to say you'll refuse him if he proposes?"

"Name of a pewter plate, that's just what I *do* mean," returned Georgie, calmly. "But I hope no such disagreeable task will be necessary, for I believe he understands that I never intend to change my name. I've told him so in the course of conversation once or twice, I believe."

"A body would think you'd been married and divorced, to hear you talk about 'experience,'" retorted Ray. "Do you suppose you'll keep such a foolish resolve? Of course you'll marry, and before long, too. A girl like you isn't often permitted to go through life 'all forlorn,' and my advice to you is to make up your mind that you'll become Mrs. Lee Grant before the roses are in

bloom again. Do, and we'll all go over to Europe together in June. Seriously, Georgie, you couldn't do better. Just think of your position here in society. You'd be the envy of all the women, and you could live *en princesse*. Besides, you and Lee were made for each other."

"You thought the same thing about Jack."

"Well, so I did," admitted Ray, "but it seems I was mistaken."

"I could never love any one again," replied Georgie.

"See here," exclaimed Ray, suddenly, "you're not pining after *him* yet, are you? Because if you are, I can tell you that you are wasting your time. I heard yesterday from a person who knows all about it that he is at present paying great attention to some widow or other living in New York, a perfectly respectable person, but desperately in need of number two, as number one left her with a small army of debts to be settled when he died and little to do it with. *On dit*, she is very hasty of temper, and that she actually tongue-lashed her husband into his grave. Jack no doubt has already heard this rumor, and yet he is devotion itself to her."

If Ray intended to be cruel, she must have been

satisfied with the effect of her speech, for Georgie turned white to the lips.

"Who told you this?" she asked, in a low voice.

"A friend of Charley's, who knows Mr. Nelson well. But, my dear, it was foolish of me to even mention his name to you, since it affects you so. Pray forgive me. I wouldn't have hurt your feelings for the world."

"You haven't hurt my feelings," answered Georgie, "only it was a slight shock, and you know I'm not well. I think I'll go to bed, for talking has made my head worse again. No, never mind the flowers—I'll take care of them. See, I'll put them on this little table at the head of my bed, where I can look at them the first thing in the morning."

CHAPTER V.

A PLEDGE OF SECRECY.

Two weeks later Georgie went to the theater with Lee and Mr. and Mrs. Wolcott. It had been agreed upon that they were all to return to the 'Thornes' for a little supper, as Mr. Thorne was fond of playing the host and considered his cook the finest in town.

"What's the use of eating all sorts of mysterious mixtures when you can sit down to your own table and feel satisfied that you're in no danger of being poisoned?" he would say when his wife found fault with him for accepting so few invitations to dine out with her.

When they reached the house, however, they were met by Mrs. Thorne's maid with a note which she gave Georgie.

"My Dear Georgie," she read. "Charlie has been seized with one of his old fits of indigestion and is so ill I am afraid I cannot join you for supper. It is nothing serious, but as he will not let anyone give him his

medicine excepting myself I cannot very well leave him. Do not let this interfere with your pleasure, however. Joseph will wait upon you just as though I was there, and if you want anything ring for Annette. When you come upstairs knock at my door. RAY."

"Well," said Mrs. Wolcott, "what shall we do?"

"As she suggests, I suppose," answered Georgie. "It's very unfortunate, but everything is ready for us, and it would be too bad to ignore Eugene's efforts. Even if we die of dyspepsia or ennui brought on by too much of each other's society we ought to try and eat something for his sake, anyway. Poor Mr. Thorne, I'm so sorry he's ill, he's such excellent company in his own house. And I'm sure it's a great disappointment to Ray; she always enters into anything of this kind with so much spirit. Annette," (to the maid who was assisting the ladies with their wraps) "tell madam if she can possibly leave Mr. Thorne for even a few minutes later on, to join us."

But madam did not appear, and the supper which was composed of salads, cold meats, and a dozen dainty little dishes intended to coax the

appetite of not very hungry people, went on as gayly as it could under the circumstances.

They all hoped and half expected to hear Ray's gay laugh and light foot-fall in the hall before they had finished, but in vain. Georgie felt a sense of unrest and was soon distinctly bored with Mrs. Wolcott's nonsense and shrieks of silly laughter, while she, seeing that the others were inclined to be quiet, seemed to feel called upon to entertain them all. It was a relief to two of the party at least, when Mr. Wolcott's carriage was announced, and the door had closed upon the last ringing peal of laughter.

Lee lingered a little while, as it was not late, to look at some engravings which Mrs. Thorne had told Georgie a day or so previous to show him, and which, until he reminded her, she had forgotten.

As he sat there, looking at her and drinking in the pure loveliness of her face and form, he was filled with a longing to keep her and never let her leave him again. She seemed so sweet and noble, so capable of a life-long devotion. Never had a woman moved him as this one did; he began to wish vaguely that he had lived a better, more useful life, not that he had been any worse

than other men, but he wished he could offer her a name made famous by good deeds. It was not a passing admiration for her beauty that he felt—he had seen hundreds of lovely women before now—but she possessed that indescribable “something” which is the attribute of the object of our adoration only once in a life-time.

Almost before he realized it he was pouring passionate words into her ear and begging her to “make him the happiest of men.”

He had not meant to precipitate his declaration; he had intended to be patient, as Ray had advised, for he was afraid he might frighten her if he hurried matters. Knowing how recent her last engagement was, he thought it but natural she should hesitate before binding herself a second time. But he lost control of himself, and rushed blindly on, taking the risk of losing her by his haste.

At first, as she listened, a look of pain flitted across Georgie’s face; perhaps she was thinking of the time when her heart had bounded with joy at hearing words of the same import from another. How gladly she had said yes, and what a thrill of bliss that betrothal kiss had given her.

And yet, this man was handsomer than Jack, and in every way calculated to make her a more desirable husband. Nine women out of ten would not have looked at Jack when Lee was around, but she was that tenth.

As Ray had said, her resolve never to marry was a foolish one, for she might find contentment, at least, in matrimony. She would have no right to think of any one then but her husband, and there was a possibility that she might find happiness, too, after she had outlived all memories of the past. Why should she not risk it, at any rate? Other women had "loved and lost" before now, and had lived to make good wives and mothers.

Then a distorted vision of Jack rose up in her mind. How she had loved him! Would she be doing right in giving herself to this man, when she knew she would probably never be able to feel toward him as a wife should toward her husband? If she had only never met Jack. But it was too late to wish that now. Then she thought of the woman Ray had told her about, and she wondered vaguely who she was. She would write and find out. Then she asked herself bitterly, why she should bother about any person or thing

concerning Jack? He had gone voluntarily out of her life; let him stay. The opportunity for her to shake off the miserable past had come, and she would embrace it.

All this time Lee was waiting for his answer.

In a few words she gave it to him, and submitted, with very good grace (under the circumstances), to being taken into his arms and caressed after the usual custom of lovers. But when he begged her to name an early date for the marriage, she proved reticent, and absolutely refused to listen when he said something about a month being quite long enough to wait.

"Six weeks, then?" he suggested, hopefully.

"No, nor sixteen," answered Georgie, decidedly. "I will not think of getting married under six months. Why, I hardly know you, and haste in a matter of this kind is worse than folly."

He was inclined to rebel, but concluded to yield to her wishes.

"Another thing," she persisted, "you must promise me to say nothing about our engagement until I give you leave. As for me, I shall tell no one but my aunt and Mrs. Thorne, for they have the right to know."

Here, too, he showed signs of dissatisfaction,

but was obliged to accede to her once more, for she told him plainly that on these two points she was determined to be obeyed.

"Don't think me unkind, but I've been all through the horrors of one broken engagement, you must remember," she explained, "and don't propose to have my name before the public under the same circumstances again, for if anything should cut ours short, I would never hear the last of it."

He went up to her and took both her hands in his.

"Tell me," he said, earnestly, "has this hesitation anything to do with your other affair? Are you sure that your heart is free to give again?"

Georgie flushed a little beneath his gaze, but raised her clear eyes to his face as she responded, sincerely:

"Perfectly. He has gone as entirely out of my life as if he had never existed. But if you do not care to trust me——"

"Trust you, my darling?" he replied, passionately. "I'm only too glad to be able to do so. Let the past go, and let us never refer to it again. It must always be a painful subject for you, and

I"—smiling—"might get jealous of this unknown first-comer."

When she went up stairs she knocked gently at Ray's door, and then went on to her own room. Before she had time to turn up the light and dismiss the sleepy maid who was dozing in her chair, she heard a quick footstep in the hall, and a moment later Ray entered the room and unceremoniously threw herself down on the tiger-skin in front of the fire. She was a cold-blooded little creature, and was always complaining of being chilly. Her silk wrapper was open at the throat, and showed the plump white throat and breast; her hair was hanging loosley down her back, and Georgie noticed that her face was haggard and looked as if she had been crying. She lay with her eyes fixed on nothing in particular, twining her fingers nervously in and out of the animal's hair, for fully five minutes, without speaking a word. Then she said, moving a little away from the blaze:

"Don't you love to lounge before a fire?"

"I don't know. Yes, of course, when I'm cold," answered Georgie.

"I mean to lie in front of it and dream. No, I don't believe you do; it isn't natural to you to

loll. I can't imagine you sprawled out this way, slowly baking yourself, first on one side and then on the other," returned Ray with a mirthless little laugh. "Do you know I think I'd make a good Turk, for there's nothing I like better than to 'hang around' and 'take my comfort' for six days out of the week."

"And on the other one?"

"Then I want to go in for a rattling good time, to do whatever I choose, and thoroughly enjoy my youth and health. If I were a man I think I should never remain a month in the same place, but as I am not, I indulge occasionally in a cigarette and dream, and dream, until I am no longer myself."

"You worthless little creature!" exclaimed Georgie.

"I dare say I am," admitted Ray, lazily, "but that's my disposition and I can't help it; can I? I sit here hour after hour sometimes, when I'm out of sorts, and try to imagine a day when I can do just exactly as I like."

"That day will never come, my dear. Fancy such a state of affairs!" said Georgie, lightly. "Your friends would have rather a hard time of it I'm afraid, you are so full of whims. If you

got offended at any of them you would throw them out of the window, if it was nearer than the door."

"No, I'd promise to be very good. But, honestly, you, with a great many other deluded people, seem to think my life is a bed of roses."

Georgie looked smilingly at her.

"Well, and isn't it?" she asked.

"By no manner of means," promptly returned Ray.

"Something troubling you? What's the crumpled rose leaf this time?"

"It's no rose leaf, I assure you; it's a real Thorne, and a mighty big one at that," answered Ray with a forlorn little smile at her joke, "and it troubles me greatly, too."

"Tell me about it; perhaps I can help you."

"No, you can't," in a despairing tone. "Nobody can."

"It must be serious, indeed."

"I have troubles which you are fortunate enough to know nothing about yet," she said with some scorn, "and according to your own statements will always escape."

"You mean you have had a misunderstanding with your husband?"

"How discerning you are," cried Mrs. Thorne. "Misunderstanding, yes, if you choose to call it so; I would call it a row."

"Why, I thought you were on the best of terms. I'm sure you always seem to be," observed Georgie.

"Of course, do you suppose I'm fool enough to let everybody see through my key-hole?" raising herself to a half-lying, half-sitting position and regarding her friend with indignant surprise. "Not much. No doubt lots of my friends would like nothing better than to know the state of my domestic thermometer occasionally, but I don't expect to gratify them. Yet, every once in a while, it flies up pretty high, I can tell you. It's about a hundred and seventy-five now, for instance."

"What sent it up this time?"

"Think what day this is and you'll understand."

"It's the first of December," said Georgie, puzzled.

"And of course the bills came in this morning. Now, Charley hates like the dickens to pay bills, and, as perhaps you are already aware, he is no bad second to me regarding temper when he gets

going; and he usually *does* get going about the first of every month. They were a little bigger this time than they ordinarily are, and consequently we had a fine scene in the library after dinner. He fumed and stormed like a madman, and refused flatly to come down to supper, and, as I had been weeping, I didn't care to exhibit myself. So I wrote that note."

"It's too bad. But he gets over his rage quickly, doesn't he?" asked Georgie.

Ray made a gesture of impatience. "Well, and if he does," she said, disgustedly, "it occurs twelve times a year regularly. Why, he grew fairly black in the face when I showed him my milliner's account. The idea! He's the most unreasonable man I ever saw. The last time we were out together he asked me 'where I got the hat,' and told me 'for heaven's sake to get another, and not disgrace him by appearing in that one any more.'

"So of course I went right around to madam's the next day and ordered another, and now he raves because it cost a few dollars more than the first. As if I could ask madam what she was going to charge me. She'd feel insulted, and tell all her other customers how mean I was. Charley

thinks I ought to find out the price of everything before I buy it. He says he always does. I generally do myself, but not when I am dealing with a French milliner or dressmaker; nobody does. I'm bound to have what I want, whether it costs much or little, and what's the use of fretting about things before the time comes to pay for them? I wish I was an actress, and then it would be all right for me to accept valuable presents from the people I entertained. I should let them give me all the thousand and one little knickknacks which go to make life endurable, and not so much as say 'thank you.' "

"Then you might see ever so many scowling faces, instead of one," remarked Georgie.

"*Pas du tout.* Men are generally too glad to furnish the 'peaches and cream' to the objects of their admiration. It's only the bread-and-butter question which galls, and that they have to respond to with their wives. It's the death of romance. Once they are sure of you they begin to show the cloven foot and try to mold you to suit themselves. Oh, I tell you they are brutes when you know them well."

"You're very discouraging indeed," observed Georgie.

"But this cannot affect you," uttered Ray pointedly.

"Still, people have been known to change their minds."

"What," cried Ray. "Yes, you're actually blushing. So Lee proposed to-night, and you accepted him?"

"Yes."

Again there was a short silence. Then Ray said, kissing her:

"Well, my dear, I wish you every possible happiness, of course. Lee is a splendid fellow, and if there ever was a girl with a bright prospect before her, it is you. But I'm hardly in the mood to congratulate you very heartily just now. When I can I will, and in the meantime I will pray for you. By the way," more brightly, "there's your guitar. Hand it to me and I'll sing something appropriate for the occasion. Now what shall it be?" as Georgie obeyed her.

"Anything, only be careful, or you'll disturb Charley."

"Happy thought," returned Ray, unfeelingly, "he disturbed me this evening, and now I'll take a turn."

She struck a chord or two, and then began

"Paddy Duffy's Cart," which she executed with more noise than music. Then she lowered her voice and sang "Put on your Bridal Vail," very sweetly and pathetically.

When she had finished the last words, she suddenly dropped the instrument and burst into tears.

Georgie looked at her in consternation, but seeing that she was nervous and excited, did not attempt to check her sobs, thinking that a 'good cry' would probably relieve her.

In a few moments she grew calmer, and lifting her face, said :

"I wish I was dead—I wish Charley was dead, I wish we were all dead."

"Don't!" remonstrated Georgie, softly; "don't say what you don't mean; you're not quite yourself to-night."

"But I do mean it. If you knew how wretched I am sometimes."

"So are we all, but we get over it and are happy again."

Ray shook her head mournfully.

"I'm never happy. I haven't been for years."

"My dear girl," exclaimed Georgie, "what are

you saying? Generally speaking, you are one of the merriest, brightest women I ever met."

"Well, my heart's usually heavy, for all that."

As Georgie made no reply, Ray dragged herself toward her, and laying her head in her lap, continued in a weary tone:

"You see, dear, you don't know the horrors of living with a man you hate and despise."

"You hate and despise!" echoed Georgie. "Why, this is dreadful, Ray; I can't understand it."

"No, I say you can't. But I do, only too well."

"But since when have you turned against your husband? When you married him you cared for him surely."

"No, I never cared for him, I tolerated him, but that was all. I knew from the first that he was anything but the kind of man I would wish to marry, but I thought he was better than he was, and he gets more insufferable every day. It's only a question of time how long I can stand it."

"What is the reason you hate him?"

"Oh, they are many. He's mean and stingy, and so narrow-minded. The only thing he spends money for without grumbling is his table; being a gourmand himself, he doesn't consider gluttony

in others a fault, and is willing to cater to both his own and his friends palates to any extent. That's why he's so popular with the club men. He feeds them well and they never decline his invitations. I always knew he was fond of eating, and that he wasn't inclined to throw money out of the window, but you may believe I never supposed for an instant that he would turn out as bad as he has."

"But if you didn't love him why did you marry him? Surely you had other opportunities to marry well."

"Yes, but not so rich. I always was fond of luxuries, and got them," drawing a deep breath, "but they have cost me many a dreary hour. Oh, I'm so sick of it all. I feel as if I could kill myself sometimes."

"Why don't you go away somewhere and get rest and perfect quiet for a while? Life might look brighter on your return."

"Alone?"

"No, with some congenial companion. It might do you so much good. I believe you're tired out in mind and body."

Ray opened her eyes to their fullest extent, and, as if just struck with an idea, she half rose, and

putting her hands on her friend's shoulders, exclaimed:

"I've got it; the very thing. I will go away, not to some gloomy country place where I would die of the 'blues' in two days time, but to New York, where I will have a complete change of people and sights, and you shall come with me. You need a little rest, too; it will do you lots of good. You will come, won't you? I must do some shopping there soon, anyway. Don't say no, but let's go, and we can be as independent as queens for a week; we need not see a soul, and can be just as selfish as we like. It will be jolly."

Georgie hesitated a moment, as if turning this proposition over in her mind, and then she bent over and kissed the eager little face in front of her.

"Yes," she said, "I will go with you, and we can start as soon as you please. But I think the country would be the best place for us, for many reasons."

"Bah! I loathe the woods, and fancy a farmhouse in midwinter. No, a big city is the best place for us,"

CHAPTER VI.

AT A NEW YORK HOTEL.

Two days later Georgie and Ray were settled in New York at the Hoffman House. They had selected this hotel not only on account of its superiority over most of those in the city, but also because Georgie had lived there for some years before her father's death, and so was sure of receiving the best attention.

Mr. Thorne accompanied his wife from Philadelphia and saw that everything was arranged for their comfort before Georgie, who had paid a flying visit to her aunt, joined them.

Their rooms, like most of those at this superb hotel, were large and elegantly furnished. They were connecting, and Ray's opened into a cozy little sitting-room, where they intended to take their breakfast and dinner every day, and luncheon wherever they chose. Ray, who never did anything for herself in the way of dressing, brought her maid, while Georgie, who was less

fastidious, left hers at home, declaring she would not be bothered with her, and that for the few days they were going to spend there, she could wait upon herself.

They arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon, and, as they were somewhat fatigued by their journey they decided to dine by themselves at six o'clock, and retire early. Accordingly Mr. Thorne, after giving the necessary orders to the waiter who was to serve them, hurried off to catch his train.

The two girls put on loose tea-gowns, and sat down to the table just as the soup was brought in.

"Do you know, I think this is going to be delightful," observed Ray, as she pounced on the celery. "I feel hungrier to-day than I have for months. I'm sure this little trip is just what we both needed to tone us up. I get so mortally sick of seeing the same faces day after day that sometimes I make up my mind I will just stay in the house and give up society altogether. It gets so monotonous after a while. Don't you think so?"

"I never did care for it very much," answered Georgie. "I like to go out, occasionally, just

when I feel in the humor for it, but this incessant round of dinners, luncheons, dances, and suppers, possesses no charms for me whatever. In fact, I can't stand it; I'm not strong enough. I found out at the end of my first season that there was nothing in it. You simply wear yourself out in trying to please or amuse other people, with very little satisfaction to yourself. It seems strange, but at my first reception everybody appeared to me to be so pleasant and agreeable, I couldn't tell whom I liked best. At my last, there weren't half a dozen persons I would care to go across the room to shake hands with. I've discovered that the only way for me to enjoy life thoroughly is to have a few well-chosen friends, and live for them alone."

"My idea, exactly," rejoined Ray, decidedly; "when I have five or six nice, jolly people whom I know well, around me, I'm perfectly happy. I hate crowds."

"Another thing which may strike you as odd," pursued Georgie, "is, that I no longer care for what you call 'nice, jolly people'; they seem so superficial to me, and soon get to be as tiresome as the rest."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Ray, "they're the only

ones who don't bore me. When I'm with them I cast off every care I have in the world, and forget there is such a thing as trouble."

"That's the difference between our dispositions, then."

"Yes, it is, certainly, and either you've changed a great deal in a few years (for you were a very merry school-girl), or else I'm getting in my dotage."

The next three mornings they spent in shopping, and the afternoons in driving in the park.

Ray continued in the best of spirits, and was unusually lively, buying everything she fancied, and trying to urge Georgie to do the same.

"Why, if I had your money, I wouldn't deny myself a single thing," she said, just after having made a most extravagant purchase.

Georgie smiled.

"I don't see that you do now," she responded. "I'm positive you spend four times as much as any woman of your acquaintance. You must be poorer by hundreds of dollars this morning than you were yesterday."

"Well, if I am, I haven't gotten one unnecessary article. I needed all I bought."

There was no answer to be made to this, so Georgie wisely held her peace.

In about four days' time, however, Ray began to get restless and uneasy. She was rapidly tiring of this *solitude a deux*, as she jokingly called it, and, in spite of her efforts to appear cheerful and contented, Georgie noticed that she was already commencing to long for the congenial companionship of her gay friends.

Ray, having spent most of her life in or near Philadelphia, knew very few people in New York, and she hailed with delight any acquaintances of Georgie's whom they met on their walks or shopping tours, and begged them, indiscriminately, to "take pity on their loneliness, and call."

Finally Georgie began to be annoyed at her continual complaining at the very arrangement she herself had made, so one morning she said, half-jestingly, half-seriously:

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to send for Charley to come on for a day or two? He's certainly better than no one to talk to."

Ray reddened, and flashed a scornful glance at her.

"How you talk," she said. "As if I didn't come here on purpose to get rid of him. But I'll

tell you what would be a good idea, and I wonder it hasn't occurred to you before this, that is, to ask Lee on. He could take us around, you know, and then we could go to the theater for a change. He may have some friend here in the city, too, who would be willing to make a fourth to our party, and then I shouldn't be left out in the cold."

"That's not a bad suggestion," replied Georgie, thoughtfully, "but how would it look?"

"Look? Why, it would look all right, of course. You're engaged to Lee, and I'm chaperoning you here in New York for a week. What could be more natural than that he should wish to see you during that time?"

"That part would be well enough, I suppose; but I'm not so sure about the other man."

"Well, I don't know any reason why he shouldn't bring a friend with him to call if he chooses."

"To call; yes, there would be no objection made to that. But people would be very apt to talk if they saw us all going out at night together."

"People? What people?" asked Ray. "I don't know a soul in New York."

"But I do, a great many souls," declared

Georgie, "and they would certainly take it upon themselves to wonder at everything they saw me do which they didn't understand. You know perfectly well yourself how they can talk."

"But don't I tell you you're quite safe? They can't say a word against you," persisted Mrs. Thorne, petulantly.

"Why not?" returned Georgie; "they don't know how things are. My engagement hasn't been announced yet, you must recollect, and they would undoubtedly draw some kind of a conclusion of their own if they saw four of us out together. People are none too charitable, as a usual thing. And besides, you must know a few New Yorkers."

"Not more than half a dozen, anyway," admitted Ray.

"Every one of whom would be sure to see you and make unkind remarks."

"I wouldn't care. Let them talk; their clatter can't hurt me."

"It might reach Charley's ears."

Ray whirled about impatiently.

"Upon my word," she exclaimed, angrily, "what a fuss you do make for nothing. A body would think I was meditating some crime, instead of a

very innocent evening's amusement. You surprise me sometimes with your Puritanical notions. What's the good of borrowing trouble in that way? There isn't the least harm in what I suggested, but you go on as if I were talking of running away from home or something equally desperate. We're only young once, and should try to make the most of our time while we can enjoy it. Why," she went on, working herself into a passion, "if any of these old idiots should happen to see me at the theater with a man whose grandmother's pedigree they didn't happen to know, and make remarks, do you suppose it would affect me? Not at all, I assure you, as long as I knew I was doing nothing wrong. I should snap my fingers at them."

"But Charley?" suggested Georgie, quietly.

"Bah! if he found it out, and saw fit to quarrel with me about such a little thing, I would snap my fingers at him, too," cried Ray.

"What if he should be seriously offended?" persisted Georgie.

"And put me out of the house? Well, the world is large, and I should consider myself well rid of such a fool," answered Ray. "But why do you always suppose disagreeable things and make

objections to everything I propose? You seem to think I'm a child, and you thwart me continually. It's too much, I declare," she went on excitedly; "you are really too prudish and old-fashioned to put up with."

For the first time Georgie was really offended.

"I'm sorry you're disappointed in me," she said, icily, "but perhaps it's just as well that I should know it, before we go any further. I scarcely see why you should call me either 'prudish' or 'old-fashioned,' however, simply because I don't choose to fly into the face of propriety. I remember, if you don't, that we are two women alone in a hotel, and that we should be particularly careful of our actions on that account, and not do things deliberately which might astonish even our own friends. As it is, I don't think we're altogether above criticism, now."

"I suppose you refer to the cognac I take occasionally after my coffee," sneered Ray.

"Not more than I do to the people you invite here. It would be well enough to see some one once in a while, but I don't think it's the thing for us to have people running in continually. Now, for instance, I don't think it was necessary

for you to invite Mr. and Mrs. Lovell to stay to dinner yesterday."

"Why, they are friends of yours," returned Ray, in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Then, don't you think it would have been just as well to let me ask them? They aren't people I care particularly for, at any time," replied Georgie, "and I wouldn't invite them to take a meal with me in my own house, to say nothing of a hotel like this. She has a long tongue, and, the first thing you know, will be saying something spiteful about us, especially as I was not very cordial in my invitation."

"Well, I only thought they would help to relieve the monotony a little. It gets so stupid and poky with only ourselves day after day," uttered Ray, crossly, "and your society isn't always sufficient to make a person forget that such a thing as trouble exists in the world."

Georgie turned scarlet, and walked away without a word. She was so angry that she had to bite her lips to keep from making the stinging reply which was on the end of her tongue.

Ray, seeing that she had gone too far, sprang toward her and caught her hand.

"Don't leave me that way," she said, plead-

ingly; "pray, *pray* forgive me. I didn't mean to be so hateful, truly. I've got such a nasty way of saying thoughtless things and hurting people's feelings. Please look at me and say you'll forgive me, won't you?"

Then, as Georgie paid no attention to her, but struggled to free herself, she clasped both arms around her waist, and kneeling down in front of her so that she could not take a step without treading upon her, looked imploringly up into her face and continued to beg pardon for her rudeness.

Georgie was finally forced to let her eyes rest upon her, but as she did so, she could not prevent them from expressing the disgust and contempt she felt for the cruel, selfish creature at her feet.

She reluctantly spoke the words which Ray was pleading for so earnestly, more to get away from her than because she really felt friendly toward her.

Then she shut herself up in her room, where she remained until lunch was on the table, trying to battle against the mistrust of Ray which she felt was growing upon her, and, apparently, she conquered, for when she joined her again it was with her usual manner.

That afternoon, unknown to Ray, she telegraphed Lee, inviting him to dine with them the following night. She intended to surprise her if he came, by taking a box for a certain play which she knew she was very anxious to see. She said nothing in her message about his bringing any one with him, though, for she had made up her mind to ask her grandmother and uncle to join them. Appearances were worthy of some consideration, in her eyes, at any rate, and if she followed Ray's instructions in this matter, appearances would certainly suffer.

"I'm willing to let her have her own way in a great many things," she said to herself, "but there are a few in which I think my opinion is worth more than hers. If he comes, we will dine here quietly, and meet the others at the theater; then afterward we can have supper by ourselves, if she likes. But I am determined there shall be no 'fourth,' for her own sake as well as mine. Besides, I am sure Lee wouldn't approve of such an arrangement any more than I do."

She received his reply an hour or so later. It said that he would be with them in time for dinner the next evening.

The following morning Ray was seized with a

desire to take a Turkish bath, saying that she had never tried one and was anxious to do so. Georgie, who always yielded to her when she expressed any reasonable wish, accompanied her accordingly.

She enjoyed it hugely, but willful as usual, she paid no attention to the admonitions of her attendant, and staid in the water far beyond the prescribed time. As a consequence, after luncheon, she was taken ill with a severe chill.

Georgie advised her to go to bed for an hour or so and be rubbed with alcohol, as she complained of feeling lame all over. Then she (Georgie) dressed and went out, promising to be back early.

Ray submitted to being manipulated and coddled by her maid (who, by the way, was devoted to her) until she was so drowsy that she could no longer keep her eyes open. Then the woman threw one of her pretty lace wrappers around her, and after dropping the curtains in the sitting-room, left her to doze a little while on the sofa.

She soon fell into a quiet, dreamless slumber, which would probably have lasted for hours had she not been aroused by a rap at the door.

Startled, as a person is apt to be, when called out of a sound sleep, she opened her eyes suddenly, dimly wondering what had disturbed her. Then as the knock was repeated she lifted her head, too exhausted to rise, and called out drowsily:

“Come in.”

A waiter entered with a card in his hand.

She read: “Mr. Lee Percival Grant,” and gave a little cry of joy.

She opened her lips to tell the man to beg him to wait a few moments and she would receive him, when Lee, supposing of course that he was expected, stepped into the room, hat in hand. So James went quietly out and closed the door after him.

They both looked a little confused, but Ray was the first to recover herself.

She held out her hand to him and said, smiling faintly:

“I hope you will excuse my not rising, Lee, but you see I’m on the sick list to-day. I took a Turkish bath this morning and it proved too much for me. But I’m better now, and am delighted to see you, and I’m sure Georgie will be. Why didn’t you let us know you were

coming, though? We might both have been out; as it is, it's only by chance that I am at home."

"Why, Georgie telegraphed me yesterday to come. Surely she received my reply," he returned with surprise.

"She never said anything at all to me about it."

"That's strange," he observed, "and she's out now, you say?"

She nodded.

"Oh, well," he said, with the air of confidence in his fiancée so usual with a man in love, "I suppose she'll soon be home now, and then she can tell us why she neglected to tell you. She expected me. Of course she has some good reason."

"She'll have her reasons no doubt," replied Ray, "but what good there can be in such foolishness as she has displayed on this occasion I can't quite understand."

She was provoked to think that he had walked in upon her in this unceremonious way when she knew she must be looking far from her best.

As for Georgie, she would have enjoyed nothing better than slapping her face at that minute. But, as it was, she was powerless to express her opinion, for she knew Lee would resent the first

disparaging word she spoke of Georgie. So she was obliged to swallow her rage.

Lee placed his hat and coat on a chair and prepared to make himself comfortable, while she was wondering how she could escape to her room, in order to make herself more presentable.

She knew that if she moved he would see that she was minus most of her hair; the greater part of it being at that moment gracefully reposing on her dressing table. Try as she would, however, she could think of no reasonable excuse to send him out of the room, so she gave it up in despair and settled back among her cushions with a deep sigh.

"I'm awfully sorry to find you so miserable," he said sympathetically, mistaking the meaning of her respiration. "Don't you think you had better see a doctor? There must be one in the hotel. You may get worse if you don't."

She shook her head languidly.

"I don't feel particularly ill," she murmured, "but I've got the 'blues' I imagine. It's so tiresome to be in the house alone all the time. Even my buoyant nature cannot always stand the pressure."

"But Georgie is generally with you, isn't she?"

Another shake.

"She knows so many people here, you know, that she spends most of her time returning their calls."

Lee looked astonished.

"Why, I thought you both came here for a complete rest," he said, "and didn't intend to do any entertaining."

"So did I," she replied. "I was on the go so much last month, that I thought a change—a complete change, would benefit me. But I didn't bargain for company all day. It is quite as laborious to entertain here as at home."

"More so, I should fancy. But whom does she have, men or women?"

"Oh, both," innocently, "not many men to be sure, but one or two come quite frequently."

The angry scowl which appeared on his forehead showed her that she had scored.

"I cannot understand," he began, "why she should wish to see people here, when she was apparently so indifferent to it in Philadelphia. It's remarkable."

"It is odd," she returned. "But look," picking up half a dozen cards from the table and holding them up to him; "these came yesterday."

He took them and glanced them over, and then, as if ashamed of having suspected her, even for a moment, he flung them down impatiently.

"It's her own business whom she receives here, I suppose," he said, shortly, "and I've no right to interfere."

"Of course," she admitted, sweetly. "Only," determined to send a parting shaft, "it seems strange, as you say, that she should wish to see people here when she seemed to care so little about it when she was with me. Still, it's not my place to find fault with her."

"I wouldn't care how many women Georgie had come to see her," he observed, returning to the subject a little later, "but I don't think she ought to have men running here. I'm not jealous, but it isn't the thing."

"That's just what I think. But of course I can't say a word to her. Her grandmother, who sees a great deal of her, should do that. She's not my guest now, you know. Besides, she receives her friends alone, as a rule; I seldom come into the room."

He paced up and down thoughtfully two or three times without speaking, Ray watching him slyly all the while under her half-closed eyelids.

Finally he stopped in front of her and rousing himself suddenly said, half appealingly :

"Ray, do you think it possible that she could be two-faced? "

Mrs. Thorne started as though such a thought had never occurred to her.

"Oh, I'm sure, I hope not," she answered promptly, with a great show of sincerity. "That would be terrible. But," lowering her eyes and lifting them again as if uncertain whether to proceed or not, "I'll tell you one thing, Lee, and that is, that if I had to do it over again I don't think I would try to throw you two together. I'm afraid it was a blunder on my part."

He looked positively alarmed.

"What do you mean?" he asked, dropping heavily into a chair beside her, with a strange sinking of the heart.

"Well, simply that I really can't make up my mind that she will make you the sort of a wife you believe she will," answered Ray. "She doesn't appear to return your love as I would like to see her. She seems so half-hearted, so cold, and she rarely mentions your name to me except in the most casual, commonplace way. Still, it may turn out all right, when you've seen more of

each other; I dare say it will. Only," laying her hand upon his arm and speaking very gently, "if she is so indifferent now, she may positively neglect you after marriage. That's what I fear."

"Oh I trust not," he replied, rather coldly. "You know there are some people who feel a great deal without being able to show it. I don't usually attach much importance to exhibitions of affection and I detest gush," unintentionally giving her a stab. "Georgie is no silly school-girl, but, by Heaven, if I thought there was no chance of her ever returning the love I feel for her, I would give her up like a shot."

Just at this juncture the door opened, and the subject of their conversation entered the room.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. THORNE CRITICISED.

In the meantime, Georgie had started out to make some calls.

There were not very many, but she knew it was best for her to finish them all up as soon as possible, as it was pretty safe to conclude that Ray would decide to return to Philadelphia in a day or two, and she might not have another opportunity to get out alone.

She determined to go to her grandmother's first, and deliver her invitation for the evening in person.

It was a bitter day, and before she had gone a block she began to regret that she had not worn a vail, for the frosty air nipped her cheeks and ears unmercifully.

On Broadway the pedestrians hurried along as if anxious to get out of the biting wind.

In spite of the cold, however, groups of street-urchins gathered on the corners, trying to sell their cheap wares, or stood gazing wistfully into

the store windows at the gay holiday goods displayed there.

Wretched-looking women, leading ill-clad, sad-faced little children, besieged the passers-by, begging, more or less successfully, for "a few pennies to buy bread."

The stage-drivers, muffled up to the chin, showed only their quick, watchful eyes and the tips of their rosy noses as they drove clattering along, swinging their arms to keep up the circulation.

Men and women, laden with mysterious bundles which assumed grotesque shapes under their brown paper wrappings, hastened up and down the streets, on Christmas thoughts intent.

Georgie shivered a little as she turned into Fifth avenue, for the wind struck her full in the face, and she was glad to find herself in the close, warm atmosphere of Mrs. Wheatley's spacious drawing-room.

She found the old lady confined to her room with an attack of rheumatism so severe that she could not put her foot to the floor.

"Dear me, grandma," said she, "this is really too bad, and I was going to ask you and Uncle Harry to a play to-night."

"I'm so sorry, dearie," answered Mrs. Wheatley. "But, you see, it's out of the question; the doctor says I mayn't be out in a week. Besides, your uncle has an appointment with his lawyer after dinner; I heard him say so."

This announcement rather dashed cold water upon Georgie's plan, for how was she going to fill a box properly at a moment's notice? She was still puzzling her brain with this question when it was time for her to leave.

Mrs. Wheatley insisted upon sending for her carriage to take Georgie on the rest of her visits, saying that it was but an act of Christian charity, on such a day, and besides, her horses really needed the exercise; so, although Georgie demurred a little at first at causing so much trouble, she was not sorry to be protected from the piercing cold, and warmly wrapped up inside of the daintiest of broughams.

She found Mrs. B. and Mrs. C. out, for which she was inwardly thankful, although she smiled the customary polite little smile, and expressed herself as "so sorry," when she handed the bits of pasteboard in at the door.

Her last call was made in Washington square, on an old school friend, who had married a man

at least thirty years her senior, a cross-grained, hot-tempered old fellow, with plenty of money and a fondness for display, both of which his young wife shared with him. Their house was superbly furnished, their turn-outs eminently "correct," and their servants mere automatons, without apparently a thought or an idea outside of their several duties. Her gowns were marvels of loveliness, and she was free to come and go as she pleased, so long as she added honor and glory to the name of her husband, and did not bring even the shadow of a suspicion upon herself by any outward flirtations with "boys."

Her "set" regarded her with envy, and pronounced her the most fortunate of women, to which observation she listened with a well-trained smile, thereby strengthening the general opinion as to her perfect, unalloyed happiness.

If, indeed, at times her heart beat heavily under her Redfern bodice when the bliss of two lovers came under her notice, she soon managed to change the sigh lingering on her lips into a sneer at such "foolishness," and thank her lucky stars that there was not an ounce of *sentiment* in her whole composition. Or, if the rasping tones of her lord and master occasionally brought to her mind the fact that

she was no better than his slave, and caused her to shed hot, bitter tears, no one knew it, for she took excellent care never to show her face, even to her most intimate friends, unless it was bright and cheerful. She was well aware that society laughs a very cruel laugh at weakness and fawns at the feet of strength.

Georgie had always liked this girl, and still took an interest in her. She had been frank and impulsive before her marriage, and the change in her condition had not appeared to alter her nature to any great extent. She was a little more reserved than formerly perhaps, and less apt to express her opinions, but she remained the same generous, kind-hearted girl, in spite of the numberless opportunities she had to become selfish and dictatorial.

Georgie was told that Mrs. Templeton was at home, and a few moments later a slight, sweet-faced woman of about twenty-four danced into the room.

The kiss she bestowed on Georgie's cheek was very genuine, and her voice was entirely free from the silly affectations so in vogue with our society women nowadays.

"I was so sorry we were out when you called,"

said Georgie, after their greetings were over, and Mrs. Templeton had thrown herself in a carelessly picturesque position on the sofa.

"So was I; but I just ran in while I was out shopping. I thought I might perhaps catch you before you went to luncheon. I saw you yesterday, though. I was in Delmonico's, and you passed by. I suppose that was Mrs. Thorne with you? A pretty little woman, with painted eyes."

Georgie could not help laughing at her frankness.

"I see you're as impudent as ever," she exclaimed. "However, I shouldn't be surprised if she did tint them a little. But that's nothing now, ever so many women do."

"She rouges, too. I could see it even from where I sat," declared Mrs. Templeton.

"Nineteen women out of twenty do that," returned Georgie.

"I don't," said Mrs. Templeton, decidedly.

"No, you wouldn't be bothered; you're too lazy. Besides, you're blessed with a good color. You don't know what you might do if you were pale and sallow."

"That's very true," admitted Mrs. Templeton, candidly. "As I feel now, though, I wouldn't do

it for anything; I think it's a disgusting practice, don't you?"

"It isn't nice; still, I don't suppose it's any worse than false hair. But aside from the fact Ray may 'make up' her face, what did you think of her?"

"Oh, she's cute and quite tasty," answered Mrs. Templeton, carelessly. "She reminds me of a little French doll."

"I think she's beautiful," observed Georgie, enthusiastically, "and her manners are charming. Every one likes her."

"I don't doubt at all that she's exceedingly fascinating. But do you know," Mrs. Templeton continued, examining the lace on the edge of her sleeve critically, "I'm positive I shouldn't fancy her particularly." She finished her remark in a half-hesitating, half-apologetic tone.

"Why, how could you tell, from one little glance at her?" asked Georgie, with a slight show of impatience.

"I couldn't, of course, to any certainty," acknowledged her friend, "but we cannot always account for the impressions we receive. I should imagine Mrs. Thorne to be—well, what shall I call it? Not very sincere."

"Indeed, you're altogether wrong," said Georgie, shortly; "she's a most devoted friend."

"That may be. I only tell you what my impression of her was. You asked me, and I can't help telling you what I think."

"No, of course not. I did ask your opinion, and I must take it."

"Certainly, for what it's worth," rejoined Mrs. Templeton, good-naturedly. "I'll explain to you why I think as I do. Mrs. Thorne has a manner of holding herself, and rather a conceited way, I thought, which gave me the impression that she would do anything to draw attention to herself, and women who constantly crave admiration are apt to be very indifferent friends, I've discovered. But let's drop the subject. I don't know Mrs. Thorne, and have seen her only once; consequently I have no right to judge her. Perhaps if I ever met her I should fall in love with her, like all the rest. How did you leave Mrs. Clarke? She was ill the last time I visited your house, you remember."

And so the conversation drifted from one thing to another until the clock struck four, when Georgie rose with a start.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "I must hurry off,

this instant. I'll never get home if I don't go now, and we have an engagement for this evening."

When she was rolling swiftly toward Broadway, which was now a blaze of light from the brilliantly illuminated store windows, she could not help reverting in her mind to the remarks which Mrs. Templeton had made concerning Ray.

"It seems to be the general opinion that Ray is frivolous and fond of admiration," she soliloquized, "and I'm beginning to believe she is, myself. But that she's untrustworthy, I don't believe. She may be vain and small in a good many ways, but I think she's very strong in her friendships."

As the carriage approached Tiffany's, she motioned the driver to stop.

A few days before Ray had gone into raptures over a diamond and sapphire ring, which she undoubtedly would have bought then and there, had she not considered the price a little too high for her purse, especially now, when she "really needed so many other things."

Georgie thought this would be a good opportunity to please Ray, and at the same time to make her a little peace-offering to show that she,

at any rate, bore no ill-feeling on account of the disagreement of the morning before. Her conscience troubled her a little, too, for the unkind thoughts which she had had of Ray. She was a quick-tempered little creature, and so accustomed to having her own way that she had become convinced she ought always to have it; she really meant no harm, and then she had begged pardon for her bad behavior so prettily; just like a petted, spoiled child. Perhaps she had been a little hard on her, for Ray was the best-intentioned woman in the world, and nobody could persuade her to the contrary.

So she argued with herself as she made her way through the crowded store to where the coveted jewel was.

It was the work of but a few moments to select it from the velvet bed which it shared with dozens of others, pay the price, and re-enter the carriage.

As she alighted at her hotel, she started a little at the sight of a figure just in front of her. It was only a man in a long, heavy overcoat, which he wore unbuttoned and thrown open in a very imprudent fashion, considering the state of the thermometer, but there was something very

familiar in his appearance. She drew back hastily, to let him pass, hoping he had not noticed her. But she had made a false estimate of her own charms, for with the quick, almost impertinent stare which is the characteristic of most young club men when a pretty woman is around, he stepped toward her, and, after raising his hat, held out his hand and said, warmly:

"Why, how-do-you-do? This is very pleasant, I'm sure. Are you stopping at the Hoffman?"

This very commonplace greeting affected her strangely. She grew dizzy and faint as her cold fingers came in contact with his warm ones. Her eyes rested on the diamond in his extensive shirt-front, and could get no farther. Yet she controlled her voice, and said, quite calmly:

"Yes, I'm here with Mrs. Thorne."

"Ah, is she a pretty little woman with yellow hair?" he asked. "I remember her perfectly. I should be charmed to call, if I may. How long are you going to be in the city? I should like to see something of you."

He spoke carelessly, gayly, as if he were addressing some acquaintance whom he had accidentally run across, and whom he was, on the whole, rather glad to see.

"You're looking remarkably well," he went on; "in fact, I never saw you looking better. But you're cold—you're actually shivering; I mustn't keep you standing out here. Let's step inside. Or, were you on your way to keep some engagement?"

Influenced by his manner, Georgie speedily recovered her equanimity, and replied to his question quite naturally:

"I was going up stairs to our rooms," she said; "we expect company to dinner, but I hardly think our guest has arrived yet. Won't you come up and speak to Mrs. Thorne?"

She uttered these words with studied politeness, expecting of course that he would decline her invitation and go his way, after putting her in the elevator or seeing her to the foot of the stairs. To her surprise, however, he replied that nothing would give him greater pleasure, provided he would not intrude. So there was nothing for her to do except to allow him to accompany her.

He chatted in his usual pleasant tones until the elevator boy opened the door and let them out at their landing.

As they walked down the hall Georgie was wondering how Ray would take this unexpected

visit. No doubt she was dressing and would be annoyed at any interruption, as her toilet was usually the result of hours of patient toil on Annette's part. When she did emerge from her dressing room, however, powdered and perfumed, she was certainly "a thing of beauty," and as her appearance had much to do with the state of her disposition, she was a "joy" as long as her loveliness lasted. But when the wear and tear of an evening's amusement robbed her of her "pristine freshness" or some awkward person stepped on her train, thereby spoiling the hang of her gown, her amiability soon vanished, and it was the devoted long suffering Annette who generally bore the brunt of my lady's temper, when tired and cross, she dragged herself up to bed.

Annette could tell how much of madam's complexion was put on.

Annette could also tell how much of madam's sweetness was assumed.

But Annette was only a "superior lady's maid," and no one thought for a moment of interviewing her on the subject. And had any one seen fit to do so it is very doubtful whether Annette would have done anything but elevate her broad

eyebrows and reply with a shrug as French as herself, that madam was the "most perfect of mistresses and as natural as the day;" for, as I have already said, this girl was devoted to Mrs. Thorne.

Again, Ray might still be lying down, sleeping off the morning's indisposition, and if so it would be most unkind to awake her.

Georgie racked her brain, but could not decide what it was best to do. She heartily wished that she had not said anything to him about coming up stairs, or at least, that she had left him in the parlor until she found out what sort of a reception he would be apt to get.

However, it was too late to hesitate any longer, and so she gently opened the reception-room door to see if the coast was clear. She made up her mind to send him away at once with very few words if Mrs. Thorne was not in condition to receive him. She motioned him to wait outside a moment, and then advanced softly into the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. NELSON.

Ray, concluding at once that Georgie had overheard Lee's last words and would ask an explanation, determined to put on a bold front and make the best of her *faux pas*. She drew herself up and was preparing to defend herself at Georgie's first aggressive word, when she suddenly had a thought.

The room was almost dark, as Lee had not been there more than half an hour, and winter days are so short. Therefore, a person coming in from the hall would be quite unable to distinguish one object from another in it at first, and as they had been talking in low tones on account of the maid in the next chamber, there was a possibility that Georgie had noticed nothing. So with ready aplomb she exclaimed:

"Oh, my dear, is that you? I thought you were never coming back. I've been asleep all the afternoon and was only awakened a little while ago by hearing a knock at the door. Think-

ing of course that it was James, I said 'come in,' and who should enter but our good friend Lee. I was so surprised that I could scarcely speak, but it seems you expected him and said nothing about it to me, you naughty girl. But let us have some light on the subject, as this darkness is heathenish. Annette has completely deserted me, and I really can't move without assistance."

Then seeing by Georgie's face that she apparently had heard nothing, she sank back among her pillows with a little sigh of relief, while Lee, having found a match, and applied it to the gas-jet, came eagerly forward to shake hands.

"I didn't intend to be gone so long, but I couldn't help it," said Georgie, after greeting Lee cordially. "However, it's all right, I suppose, as no doubt you two have been chatting about Philadelphia, and time has flown."

"Yes, we have," returned Ray, promptly. "But tell me why did you do such a stupid thing as to ask Lee here and never mention it to me? You put me in such a ridiculous position; he came in and found me asleep on the sofa."

Georgie laughed merrily.

"Really?" she exclaimed, "what a joke; and did he wake you as the prince did the sleeping

beauty? I should have done so, had I been he. But to explain; I telegraphed Lee yesterday to come, and we would dine and go to a play to-night. I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for you, Ray. By the way, how are you now? Better, I hope, for I've brought some one with me."

"A visitor? How could you, when you know I'm not prepared to see a soul!" exclaimed Ray, in dismay.

"You look all right, really. Quite interesting, doesn't she, Lee? I met this person just at the foot of the stairs, and he insisted upon coming up to speak to you. He's in the hall now. May I call him?"

"But first tell me his name. I positively will not see a stranger in this wrapper," persisted Ray, childishly.

"He's not a stranger, and I know you'll be glad to see him; besides, he insisted upon paying his respects to you, as I say. Shall I open the door?"

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Ray, shortly, though in reality she felt somewhat curious. "It's mean to keep any one waiting outside. But honestly (thinking this a good opportunity to

strengthen the impression she had given Lee), you might consult my wishes occasionally, my dear, and not have people running here at unheard-of hours, and finding me half-dressed. Just lower the gas and light the lamps, won't you? Then perhaps my negligee won't be noticed so much. That rose shade, so. Now fix this shawl for me, please. That's all. Thanks."

Georgie patiently obeyed all her rather tartly given directions, and then opened the door and ushered in Jack.

"Mrs. Thorne, you remember Mr. Nelson, do you not? He wanted so much to see you, that I could not refuse him. Mr. Grant, Mr. Nelson."

Ray started as Georgie uttered these words, and then nodded smilingly, murmuring that she remembered Mr. Nelson very well indeed.

Mr. Grant merely inclined his head, but did not move. Jack, who had a happy faculty of making himself at home in any society, immediately launched into a conversation with Ray, which included the other two, and by that means preventing any great exhibition of coolness on the part of either.

Presently Georgie arose and said she must

change her dress for dinner, casting an inquiring look at Ray as she did so. But that young woman, immensely pleased with the bright remarks and genial presence of Mr. Nelson, refused to meet her glance as she replied:

"Very well, my love. I will take care of the men while you are gone. Then I'll go and let Annette touch me up a little, for I really don't feel equal to dressing. And Mr. Nelson must stay to dinner, must he not? We'll let James serve it here, and have the coziest time, all by ourselves."

"But we were going to the theater," said Georgie, coldly.

"Indeed, I'm not able to go out to-night," returned Ray, stubbornly; "I couldn't walk to the carriage if my life depended upon it, I assure you. Let's stay here and have a jolly evening by ourselves. Parties of four are ever so much nicer than parties of three. I hate to play gooseberry. You will dine with us, Mr. Nelson, will you not?" accompanying her words with a pleading look.

"You're very kind, Mrs. Thorne," replied Jack, "and I should be delighted, only I promised to dine at the club at seven."

"But you'll break your engagement, I know, when you reflect that you'll take me out of a most tiresome position, that of playing propriety to these two. I hate to be responsible for anybody's behavior, but with your assistance I'm sure it won't be half so bad."

"If Miss Wheatley is of the same mind," responded Jack, doubtfully.

"I should be delighted of course," uttered Georgie with freezing politeness.

"Good. Now I'll have a decent evening," cried Ray, clapping her hands like a pleased child, "I had anticipated such a slow one. I expected to fall asleep over my coffee."

But Jack, noticing at once the lack of cordiality on Georgie's part, made up his mind that he had better keep his first engagement, notwithstanding Mrs. Thorne's pressing invitation.

So, starting suddenly, as if just reminded of something, he exclaimed:

"By Jove! I had quite forgotten a most important business engagement I had with my brother-in-law. It's twenty minutes past the time now," consulting his watch, "and he will be furious when I find him. I'm really dreadfully sorry, but after

all it will be impossible for me to dine with you to-night."

He noted the look of disappointment which came into Ray's face, as well as the look of relief which passed over Georgie's when he said this.

It piqued him a little to think that she, whose eyes used to glisten with pleasure at his coming, should now shun his society, and find excuses to keep out of his way, and as he put on his overcoat, he could not refrain from saying, turning to Mrs. Thorne:

"I should be pleased though if you would all dine with me to-morrow night."

Once more Ray's face lighted up with hope. Here then was another opportunity to see this charming fellow again, and, provided Georgie would not be stupid enough to frown his invitation down, she might have a little fun before she left this tiresome place for home. So, without waiting for her to answer, she burst out:

"I know I should be only too glad, Mr. Nelson. We live like hermits here and a dinner somewhere else would be such a novelty and a dissipation that I don't believe I should survive it. But I'd like to try it, nevertheless, and Georgie would too, I'm sure, wouldn't you

cherie?" turning to Miss Wheatley with her most "fetching" smile.

Georgie replied in the same coldly polite tone as before:

"Certainly, Ray, if Mr. Grant has nothing on hand for to-morrow evening, we can go."

She rather hoped Mr. Grant would notice her reluctance and plead a previous engagement, but he bowed slightly, and expressed himself as entirely at the service of the ladies. Ray, charmed to see that things were likely to run according to her liking at last, determined to clinch matters then and there and leave no loop-hole for Georgie to slip out of.

"Then it's all settled, Mr. Nelson," she said decidedly, "and we won't disappoint you. But where shall it be? Can't you suggest some real Bohemian place, where we can be quite by ourselves?"

"Let me see," replied Jack; "what do you say to Mount St. Vincent? They get up very nice little dinners there and it will be less stiff than here."

"Capital," cried Ray, gleefully. "I've never been there, and it will be a novelty for me at least."

"Then you'll leave everything to me? About what time shall I stop for you? It would be pleasanter for us all to go up together, I think, as it's quite a drive and we might have to wait for each other."

"Of course. How would six o'clock suit you, Georgie?"

"As well as any other time."

"Then I'll be here at six."

He bade them good-night, lingering a moment over Ray's hand, and was gone.

It would have been evident to the most uninterested observer that neither Georgie nor Lee relished the prospect of this dinner, and Ray, who was by no means blind, quickly realized this fact, but she was so bent upon having her own way that she was determined to brave them both, if necessary.

Of course it would have been much pleasanter if they had shown even the least particle of enthusiasm, and she thought it exceedingly selfish of them to stand there like mutes, leaving her to do all the talking and arranging; but go she would, at any cost. She did not like the expression of Lee's mouth as the door closed upon Jack, and she plainly foresaw that there was going to

be a scene, unless she was clever enough to prevent it. So while his back was turned she escaped to her room.

She knew that this was a cowardly thing to do, as Lee would undoubtedly unburden himself to Georgie, and owing to the false impressions she had given him earlier in the afternoon, he was certain to make some disagreeable remarks to her. However, she was sure that Georgie would stand up for her, and equally so that Lee would not betray what she had told him; adding to that the fact that Lee was so desperately in love that he would listen to whatever his fiancée might say, and to allow matters to be smoothed over she felt that she had pursued the best course open to her.

Nevertheless, she glued her ear to the crack of the door, ready to run in whenever she was in danger of receiving a "black eye." She did not care how bitterly they felt toward each other, or how much suffering her misrepresentations might cause either or both of them, but she must be protected at any cost. With her, self-preservation was indeed the first law of nature.

She clasped her hands on the door-knob and leaned her face upon them, waiting anxiously for the first words which she naturally supposed

would come from Lee. How great was her relief just then to hear him step to the door in answer to James' knock and say, after exchanging a few words with Georgie:

"Very well. Show him up."

Another caller. What kind fate had sent him here just in the nick of time? He would be made most welcome by her, whoever he might be.

She rang hastily for Annette and began to brush her hair with nervous fingers before the mirror. A moment later Georgie looked into the room and announced that Peter Persuade was coming upstairs.

"And do please hurry and get into your dress, won't you?" she added, "as I must take my hat and jacket off, and it won't do to keep him waiting long."

"Yes, love, of course I will," answered Ray, actually trembling with joy at this most fortunate interruption and determining to use all her powers to keep the angel of deliverance to dinner. "I'll be ready in a second. You go right along, and take your time in dressing, and I'll entertain him until you come. Mind, don't hurry now, and if you want Annette to help, you just call her."

She thrust her arms hastily into a pretty tea-

gown of old gold plush which the maid held for her, and never said an impatient word all the time she was twisting and pinning her hair on the top of her head. And when Annette informed her that the new bronze slippers which she had ordered the day before had not yet arrived, she merely said, quite amiably :

“Then give me my black ones ; only be quick.”

She did not even stop to put on the usual touch of rouge, contenting herself with brushing the powder-puff once or twice lightly across her face, and in a short ten minutes she walked into the next room where the two men were sitting.

“What in the name of all that’s outlandish brought you here, Peter?” she cried, gayly. “And how did you discover our hiding place?”

“Oh, I found out easily, and as I always try to keep an eye open for Georgie, I thought I would look you up,” he answered. “You are well? ”

Peter Persuade was a strange fellow ; in fact, a character in his way. He had seen the frosts and snows of over forty winters, but refused to acknowledge more than thirty-two, knowing that with his fine physique and ruddy, boyish complexion, he would readily be believed, and deter-

mining to make the most of the goods the gods provided.

He was a man who had knocked about a great deal and seen some funny sights, as he would tell you, with a merry twinkle in his eyes. Two fortunes had melted away in his hands, with nothing to show for them. Where they had gone, or who had been benefited by his loss, no one knew, as he apparently had no habits of dissipation, being very moderate generally in his use of tobacco and liquor, and caring but little for the society of any women, excepting a few intimate friends. Once a year regularly, however, he disappeared from sight, quietly and always alone; but where he went or what he did, nobody could ever find out, though during the past twenty years more than one person had tried hard to discover. He would return in about three months, attend to his business, resume his old pursuits, and never refer to his trips; to any one bold enough to ask, he would always reply that he had been "traveling." Queer tales, concerning those mysterious absences of his, floated around once in a while, but as the narrators never got beyond "they say" or "I don't know how true it is, but"—they were seldom given much credence.

One story, however, which was generally listened to with interest, was to the effect that he owned a tiny country-seat, just outside of New York, which he yearly filled with gay companions, whom he entertained splendidly for the length of time he staid with them. Games of chance of all kinds were indulged in, and huge sums of money lost and won. But if this was true, he took his losses or winning with wonderful equanimity, for his countenance when he came back was as unruffled as when he went away.

Another was to the effect that early in life he had fallen in love, and had been jilted by his fair inamorata for a coal king twice her age, and of a reclusive disposition. Nine months of the year, according to the gossips, she was obliged to vegetate in the wilds of Pennsylvania, miles away from any town, to suit her husband's notions. But the other three she had her way, and settled for that length of time in a beautiful house on the Hudson.

It was said that Peter, who took the vow of celibacy after his rejection, was always so affected by the sight of her, even after the cruel years had robbed her of her beauty, which had cast a spell over him at first, that he went away as soon as

she took possession of her villa, and did not return until she was gone, for fear of meeting her.

This story found more believers than the first, because Peter's own life would seem to bear it out, better than the other. He paid almost no attention to young women, preferring the companionship of the wives of his friends, none of whom were particularly remarkable for their good looks, and whose lives were above suspicion. It was the rarest thing in the world for him to express even a passing admiration for any girl, and if by chance a bright, pretty face attracted him once in a while, it was only a question of time when he would interest the damsel in some bachelor friend of his, matrimonially inclined.

He was devoted to his church, which was extremely high, and in which he was one of the bright and shining lights. He would cross himself in all seriousness on the slightest occasion, much to the amusement of his companions, and was known to do much good among the poor.

Another peculiarity of his was his love of early rising. Every day, winter and summer, he would get up at six o'clock and take long walks, accompanied only by his dogs. When asked for the

reason of these rambles, he would reply frankly that he took them to keep his complexion clear. He was a step-uncle of Georgie's on her mother's side, and had always confessedly liked and admired her more than any woman of his acquaintance. He said she was his ideal of what a girl should be, and he always managed to see her once or twice a month, at least, no matter where she was.

CHAPTER IX.

RAY'S GOOD CONDUCT.

As Mrs. Thorne and Georgie had been friends since childhood, Peter, of course, had always seen more or less of the former.

He thought her a nice, bright little creature, somewhat vain and conceited, but not more so than most pretty women, and, on the whole, rather liked her. Knowing how many women had vainly tried to bring him to their feet, she had at first bent all her efforts to make a conquest of him, thinking it would be a big feather in her cap if she could add him to the list of her suitors. But she soon discovered that she was attempting a hopeless task, and that she was no more likely to succeed than the rest, and so she wisely turned her attention to Charley Thorne, who was at that time beginning to cast longing eyes at her, and was only too willing to succumb to her charms. After the knot was tied and she no longer had any reason to worry about the to-morrows, she returned to her old tricks and

amused herself as much as she dared, without provoking her husband's wrath, with the young men she constantly met in the whirl of society in which she lived. Just at present she felt a delightful sense of liberty, and she made up her mind to do exactly as she chose. All were fish who came to her net, and it was one of her principles to scorn no one, not even the most humble and unpretending.

"One can never tell what will happen in the future," she said to herself, with a certain amount of wisdom. "Those who are up to-day may be down to-morrow, and *vice versa*."

So she chatted with Peter very pleasantly. She soon found herself quite interested in his talk, which was mostly about the doings in Philadelphia since she had left, and where he had been staying for the past six weeks.

He told her of two engagements, which were about to be made public, and got her very much excited by his description of some tableaux which were being arranged on an elaborate scale for February, and in which she was booked to appear as Mary, Queen of Scots, and Lee as Rizzio.

"I was commissioned to ask you if you would accept the part," he said. "All you will have to

do, you know, is to dress magnificently and look tenderly at Lee. You won't refuse, will you? Every one says you are just the one for it—you are so fair and he is so dark."

"I should like it immensely," she replied at once. "It will be lots of fun. You'll do it, too, Lee, won't you?"

"My gracious, no!" cried Lee, energetically. "My days for such nonsense are over. I should feel like a prize fool."

Peter threw back his head and laughed.

"You're making fun of me," exclaimed Ray, pouting. "I don't believe my name was ever proposed for such a character."

"No, Ray, it wasn't," replied Peter, still grinning, "I was only playing on your vanity a little. You'll pardon me, won't you?"

"You're too disgusting to notice," retorted Ray, angrily. But as the two men evidently thought it a huge joke she could not refuse to join in the laugh which followed.

Peter and Ray had most of the conversation to themselves, however, for Lee's remarks were few and far between, his manner being distrait and his thoughts evidently somewhere else.

It was a relief to all when Georgie joined them,

which she did just before dinner was on the table.

All through the evening Ray's conduct was exemplary; no one could have found a single fault with her. She kept the conversational ball a-rolling all the time and charmed them all by her ready wit. She took only a little claret with her meal, and did without her customary sip of cognac, though she looked longingly toward the decanter once or twice.

She was like a child who hopes by "being good" to-day to be rewarded to-morrow.

She was all sweetness and consideration toward Georgie, and tried her best to thaw the ice which she felt on both sides of her, but with very indifferent success.

Lee was distinctly glum, and Georgie was unusually quiet, eating little and saying less. She smiled now and then, however, at some of Peter's nonsense or one of Ray's bright remarks. Seeing that they two were likely to do most of the talking, and wishing to lend a helping hand, this young man started off on his favorite topic of conversation, money, and became so engrossed in his subject that he scarcely ate a morsel. Ray, leaning her elbows on the table listened to him with shining eyes.

"I would as lief be dead as absolutely poor," he observed.

"What do you mean by 'poor?'" asked Lee, somewhat amused.

"Well, I mean by 'poor,' having to struggle for a bare existence; not to be able to buy the luxuries of life—to be obliged to strain every nerve to make both ends meet, and never to be above the bread-and-butter question. That's what I call poor."

"And yet I can conceive of worse things than poverty," remarked Lee.

"Can you? I can't. What could be worse than having to drudge, year in and year out, night and day, for a mere pittance, as some poor devils do, to support their families. Sick or well, rain or shine, it makes no difference, they must be up and away at daylight, hurrying, worrying all the time, uncertain as to where their next meal is to come from. No pleasures, scarcely a moment for recreation. What could be worse?"

Lee balanced a teaspoon thoughtfully on his forefinger, before he answered. Then,

"Many things," he replied. "A guilty conscience; a wife who disgraces your name; a child who is a continual source of trouble to you."

Peter shook his head solemnly.

"You're wrong, my dear boy, dead wrong," he said. "If your conscience troubles you, travel; change of scene will often work wonders with that demon commonly called the blues. Send the ungrateful youngster away from home; refuse to pay his debts, and then if he doesn't mend his ways, disinherit him and try to forget that he ever existed. As for the wife who has no respect for you, why, get a divorce from her, and consider yourself lucky to be rid of her. All this you can do with money. If misfortune comes to you and you are rich, a hundred comforters rise up to console you. But if you are poor, what then? You may weep until you are blind, for all any one cares—you're of no importance in the world, and are unable to feed and amuse society, so why should society bother its head about you or your woes? If you've once moved within its sacred precincts, and it still remembers you, it may possibly cast you a pitying glance and tell you it sympathizes with you, but does it help you? Oh, no, it wraps itself up in its purple and fine linen, and gently but firmly pushes you out of its way, for there are so many whom it must look after, that it has no time to waste upon you. It no

longer marks you for its own, and consequently cannot be expected to take care of you."

"I don't doubt that there is some truth in what you say," admitted Lee, "but I am still of the opinion that any one of the misfortunes which I have named is worse than poverty. Barrels full of gold cannot cure a heart-ache, nor can hosts of comforters take away disgrace."

"No, but money will soften the rough edges of your grief wonderfully, as you'll find," returned Peter, "and your friends will try to convince you that what you are mourning over is not a disgrace, and that you should hold up your head as high as ever, and generally they will succeed, for mighty few of us are impervious to flattery. The touch of soft hands and the sound of sweet voices are sure to affect us all, sooner or later, and, with most of us, it is sooner."

"You seem to speak from experience," observed Ray, smiling.

Peter touched a match to his cognac-soaked sugar, and watched the blue flame slowly burn itself away.

"Yes," he replied finally, "I do speak feelingly, for I know something about what we're discussing. *Experimencia docet*. I've handled a

lot of cash in my day, and I've known what it is to have people court me—and what it is to play the *grand seigneur* to mothers who are angling for me—and to have half a dozen impecunious youths ready to black my boots at a moment's notice merely for the privilege of being in my society; of occupying the footman's seat on my dog-cart. And then," with a comical little sigh, "I've seen this golden dream vanish into thin air; I've seen the frescoed walls of my apartments crumble to pieces with greater rapidity than ever Cinderella's chariot did; I've seen the Poole suits, with which I paralyzed the Avenue day after day, gobbled up by a greasy Jew; I've seen the very dames who, a month before, had showered their sweetest smiles upon me and fairly thrust their daughters into my arms, shun me as they would the plague, and the striplings who copied my clothes, and smoked my cigars, pass me by with a hasty nod. Yes, I've known and seen all this—and have been amused. Money," lifting his coffee-cup and holding it half-way between the table and his lips, "to use the words of an old woman who came to me for assistance this morning, 'is a very comfortable article to have in the house of a cold winter's night. It will make

the fire burn and the kettle boil when nothing else will.' ”

And he drained his cup and set it down.

“I agree with you, Peter,” remarked Ray, seriously. “Give me money and I will take my chances with everything else. I should never know another happy hour if I were to become poor. I’m sure of it. They say there is nothing more dreadful than to find yourself beggared after a life of ease and affluence, but I don’t believe it; I think it’s much worse for one who enjoys the good things of life after years of poverty, to have to come down, for he knows just what he has to go through with, all over again, and the anticipation alone, must cause him perfect agony. At any rate, it would be so with me. I haven’t always been fed on ‘sweetmeats,’ as Charley would say; it’s only since my marriage that I’ve been able to buy without counting the cost, and if that privilege were to be taken away from me now, I should die. I know I should. Let any misfortune threaten, loss of friends or reputation, sickness, even death itself; I could stand *anything*, but to be deprived of the means with which to surround myself with all that to me, makes life worth living.”

She had warmed up to her subject, and was quite excited. Her eyes were moist, and the lace at her throat rose and fell with her quick, short breathing.

"Horrors !" exclaimed Georgie, holding up her hands, "how you do talk."

"She speaks from her heart," asserted Lee, quietly.

"Yes," said Ray, "I *do* speak from my heart. You see," laughing a little, softly, "I am no advocate of 'bread and cheese and kisses.'"

"But you believe in love, do you not?" asked Georgie.

"Love? Why certainly," answered Ray, "but I should always find it quite as easy to interest myself in a person who could be with me whenever I wished to see him, as in one who could devote to me only such meager half hours as he could spare from his 'business.' Life and love are both too short to be taken piecemeal."

"You want all or none, then," suggested Peter, dryly.

"Yes, everything or nothing," replied Ray, steadily.

About ten o'clock, Ray said that on account of her indisposition of the morning she thought it

would be best for her to retire early, and presently the two men rose to go.

"By the way, Persuade, where are you stopping?" asked Lee.

"At the Fifth Avenue."

"Good. So am I. We'll walk around together. Have a cigar, old man."

Ray, leaning on Georgie's shoulder, watched Lee pull on his gloves.

"Then we'll see you to-morrow a little before six," she said, as he buttoned the last button.

His face fell.

"Not before?" he asked. "Mayn't I come around to luncheon?"

"No, please, for I've lots of things to attend to, and shall be busy all the morning," answered Ray.

"But, Georgie, you'll be at liberty, won't you?"

"No," replied Ray, without giving the young girl a chance to answer, "she's going out with me, and we both want to rest in the afternoon. You can manage to occupy yourself somehow until the evening, can't you? Tell him he must, chérie."

Then, as Georgie still made no reply, Lee slowly took up his cane and said:

"Very well, then, good-by until to-morrow."

It was Ray's custom every night when she was ready for bed, to come into Georgie's room for a little chat and a final toasting before the fire. But to-night, everything was quiet next door, and Georgie wondered if she intended to come in and bid her good-night. Besides, she thought Annette was lingering much longer than ordinarily over her mistress' night toilet.

At last she heard the maid go out and softly close the door after her.

This astonished and angered Georgie at the same time. It was evident that Ray did not desire to talk with her that night, and so took this means of getting out of it. It was so small and cowardly of her. She knew that she had acted selfishly, and believed that by hiding her head, like the ostrich, no harm could come to her.

Georgie sat gazing at the logs burning in the fire-place, for a quarter of an hour after this, thinking and trying to make up her mind what it was best for her to do about this dinner, for she was fully resolved that it should not take place.

But what could she say to Ray? If she had not the delicacy to see herself that it was a most undesirable arrangement (and it was evident to

Georgie that she had not) how could she convince her? She determined to speak to her on the subject without delay, and Ray would have to listen to her. She could see by his face that Lee was as much opposed to it as she was, and unless Ray was extremely stupid this fact must have dawned upon her at some time during the evening.

She hated the idea of going in there and saying to her what she felt she must in order to persuade him that in accepting this invitation she had acted against every sense of propriety and justice to her, for she knew Ray would get angry. And yet she had no choice. It was absolutely necessary for her to go, and at once. So throwing a light shawl which lay at the foot of her bed around her shoulders, she stepped to the door and knocked gently.

No answer.

She rapped a little louder, and as there was still no response she turned the knob and went in.

The gas was turned quite low, and she saw that Ray was lying with her cheek against the pillow as if sleeping soundly; nevertheless, she called her gently once or twice, and with a start Ray opened her eyes.

"What's the matter?" she said, raising her head

a little and looking around in a bewildered fashion.

"Nothing, dear, excepting that I have something to say to you before you go to sleep," returned Georgie.

"What? Can't you wait until to-morrow? I'm so tired to-night, and I was just having such a lovely dream."

CHAPTER X.

A SERIOUS CONFERENCE.

"No; what I have to say I must say to-night, and you must listen to me," replied Georgie, seating herself on the edge of the bed. "Would you prefer to stay here, or shall we go into my room?"

"It doesn't make any difference. I suppose if your story is a long one we had better go where it's warmer."

"The length of my story will depend upon you," answered Georgie; "it may take five minutes, and it may take half an hour."

Ray would have given a great deal to be able to escape from the conversation which she knew was about to take place. This was about as miserable a "state of things" as could well be imagined. A serious *tete-a-tete* with Georgie, and no one to help her out. It was certain to be horribly disagreeable, especially as she felt guilty, but there was nothing for her to do but to follow as she was bidden, so she tumbled rather sulkily out of bed

and drew on her wrapper. She snatched up a brush as she passed the bureau, so as to have some occupation for her hands if things went too much against her and she got nervous

"Now, my dear," began Georgie, kindly, when they had found seats, "I don't want you to be offended with me, or hurt, when I tell you that I thought it very mean of you this evening to persist in asking Jack to dine here, and then to accept his invitation for to-morrow."

"And why, pray?" demanded Ray, curtly.

"Can you not understand that I have no desire, under the circumstances, to be in his company?" asked Georgie, quietly.

"No, I cannot, for if so, why did you deliberately bring him up stairs to-night?" retorted Ray.

"I had no choice; he insisted upon coming up to see you. Why he did it I don't know, unless it was to annoy me."

"But weren't you out with him all the afternoon?" inquired Ray.

"Most certainly not," replied Georgie, indignantly. "What a question! I met him in the lower hall just as I was coming in."

Ray shrugged her shoulders as if to say she

doubted that statement, but Georgie wisely pretended not to see the movement.

There was a few moments' silence, during which Ray loosened her hair and slowly began brushing it. The little onyx clock on the mantel struck once for half-past eleven.

"Well, at any rate," resumed Georgie, "I tell you, now, that it is very unpleasant for me to meet Jack or to be with him, and so I hope you'll give up the idea of our dining with him to-morrow night."

"I'm sure I see no reason why I should," declared Ray, promptly.

"You see no reason why you should?" repeated Georgie. "I think there's every reason why you should. You certainly don't want to force Lee and me to go where we don't wish to, do you?"

"Isn't that putting it rather strong?" returned Ray, snappishly. "If you and Lee were opposed to going, you should have said so earlier in the day, and not have waited until all the plans were made. You both accepted Mr. Nelson's invitation when I did, and I think it would be contemptible to disappoint him now."

Georgie elevated her brows with a gesture of indifference.

"That part wouldn't trouble me in the least," she said. "He has disappointed me often enough in times past. I shouldn't have the slightest qualm of conscience on that score, I assure you."

"Well," persisted Ray, tossing her head, "it's too late to go back now. You should have spoken before, as I say."

"Do you mean to tell me that you won't give this dinner up?"

Mrs. Thorne nodded.

"To be sure. It would be unheard of," she uttered.

"Ray, I can scarcely believe this of you," said Georgie.

"Upon my word, I actually believe you're afraid to be thrown with him again," retorted Ray, laughing unpleasantly.

Georgie looked at her with eyes blazing with indignation.

"You know better," she replied, in a low, concentrated tone. "You understand my feelings in this matter as well as I do myself, only you're not willing to acknowledge it."

"Yes, I am, perfectly," said Ray, provokingly, "only, my dear girl, I can't see why it should

make any difference to you whether Jack Nelson eats at the same table with you or not, so long as he doesn't bore you with his attentions. You're not supposed to have the least interest in him any longer; you're engaged to another man. Your affair with him is over, and ought to be forgiven and forgotten."

"It is forgiven, but not forgotten. It can never be," replied Georgie, sadly.

Ray moved nearer the fire, and taking one of Georgie's hands which lay listlessly in her lap, said in a gentler tone:

"Answer me, Georgie, do you still care for that man?"

Georgie drew her hand away, and without hesitation, replied coldly:

"I've told you repeatedly that I do not."

"Then why should you object to accepting his invitation?"

"For several reasons. First, I don't think it would be fair to Lee. Secondly, the wretched past is dead and gone, and I can't see what sense there is in digging it up again. Another thing, there is no knowing what miserable complications might arise if this dinner took place; and lastly,

it is not the proper thing for us to do. If any one saw us it would be certain to create talk."

"I don't think so, dear," replied Ray. "You are sure of yourself, aren't you? I'll promise to take entire possession of Jack, truly, so that he sha'n't bother you at all, and no one will see us. Do let us go, Georgie, for my sake; remember what a life I lead at home, and let me enjoy myself for one evening, at least, before I go back to it. I like and admire this young fellow exceedingly, and if I have a chance to spend a pleasant evening in his company, I think you ought to be willing to help me, instead of discouraging everything I propose. Come, I'd do as much for you."

Georgie turned her head away and sighed, a long weary sigh. She could think of no argument to bring to bear upon this perverse woman. She was tempted to tell her once for all, that if she was determined to go, she would have to dispense with her presence, at least. Suddenly she rose and cried:

"Are you heartless, Ray, that you cannot feel for me in this? Do you call yourself a friend of mine, and yet persist in dragging me where I do not wish to go? Put yourself in my place.

Suppose I asked you to meet and talk with a man who had treated you as Jack did me, under the same circumstances, would you be apt to do it?"

Ray looked at her sullenly.

"I cannot see why I shouldn't," she replied, doggedly.

"You think you would? Well, then," Georgie went on, vehemently, "I say you wouldn't. If you were once placed in my position, you would comprehend and appreciate my feelings, that is, if you've a heart. Sometimes I doubt if you have, you seem so cruel, so selfish. You have accepted this invitation and intend to go, that's evident; not because you care a fig about Jack, or dislike to disappoint him, but simply because you are bound to have your own way."

Ray's eyes glittered coldly.

"Put it whatever way you like," she retorted sneeringly; "yes, I am determined to go, and, unless I am very much mistaken, you will go too."

"What do you mean?" asked Georgie.

"Simply this: If you back out now both Jack and Lee will attribute it to a return of the old affection, see? They will think, and quite natur-

ally, too, that you are jealous of the attention Jack showed me to-night."

Poor Georgie sank slowly back in her chair; she had not thought of this before, and she could not help being struck with the force of the suggestion.

"That's true," she whispered, helplessly, after a short silence, "so they may."

"Of course it's true," echoed Ray, triumphantly, "and you wouldn't relish that, would you?"

There was a silence of a full half-minute after this, during which Ray watched her companion's face covertly.

Finally Georgie spoke again.

"Very well," she said, resignedly, "I'll go. But if any trouble comes of it, remember what I've said to you, will you?"

"Certainly, my love," replied Ray, very much relieved; "but no trouble will come of it, you may be sure. We'll just go and have a real jolly time, and forget all about it in a week. Kiss me good-night now, for it's getting late, and I must run back to my nest."

And, well pleased with her victory, she embraced Georgie affectionately, and sought her bed for the second time that night.

CHAPTER XI.

GEORGIE'S RING.

When the two girls met at breakfast the next morning it was snowing fast. The ground was already covered to the depth of several inches, and there was every reason to suppose there would be much more before night.

The street-cleaners were busy shoveling and brushing, but they performed thankless tasks, for almost as soon as their brooms were lifted from the sidewalk a fresh coating softly spread itself over the flags, completely hiding all traces of their work. Ray looked out of the window upon this white world in disgust, while James was bringing in the coffee.

"Isn't this glorious?" said Georgie, drawing aside the curtain. "Only it makes it so hard for the horses at first. Look at those grays down there, now, how they are struggling with their heavy load. But it will probably be better by noon."

"It's too provoking," answered Ray, irritably. "Of course our dinner's knocked in the head, for who wants to go so far in a storm like this? It's just my luck."

"Oh, no, it will stop before long, I hope, and anyway, you know, we can go in a sleigh whether it does or not, and you'll enjoy the ride ever so much more than you would a drive."

Ray brightened a little at this, but all the morning she worried and fidgeted, running to the window every few minutes to study the condition of the clouds.

She was unable to go out, on account of her cold, and would not consent to being left alone while Georgie attended to her errands for her. So she was obliged to write her wants on a slip of paper and trust to the discretion of a messenger boy. Fortunately she happened to get one who was trustworthy, and he brought everything back without a mistake.

At noon the skies began to brighten, and by half-past one the clouds broke away and the sun came out in all his glory. Consequently, luncheon was a more cheerful meal than breakfast had been.

About three o'clock a box containing two

beautiful corsage bouquets, and a note addressed to Mrs. Thorne, were brought in. Both were from Jack, who wrote to advise them to bundle themselves up well, as he would bring a sleigh instead of a carriage, and the night promised to be very cold.

Georgie's heart gave a painful leap as she looked upon the familiar handwriting once more, this time not addressed to her. But she smiled at Ray's little cries of joy when she took out the flowers, though she refused to accept either bunch.

"But he intends one for you, my dear," insisted Ray, put out by what she chose to call Georgie's nonsense.

"It doesn't make any difference, I don't care to take it," she answered, firmly.

"As you like, of course; but what will you do with it? I can't wear both, you know."

"Put it in water and leave it on the table," suggested Georgie, coldly.

"All right. But it will look queer, I think, to see me with flowers on and you with none. Really, I wish you would wear it."

"Lee may send me some."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then I shall go without."

"Well, suit yourself, Georgie, only I think you're treating poor Jack very shabbily."

A little after six Lee was ushered in, and Jack followed almost immediately.

Georgie, as was generally the case, was ready some time before Ray, and as she entered the room the two men were struck by her exquisite beauty. She wore a tight-fitting street suit of black velvet, edged at the throat and wrists with bands of sable. The jacket, which was buttoned from the left shoulder to the right hip, showed every line of her superb figure to advantage. A little Russian cap sat jauntily upon her head. A muff, and a pair of gloves to match, completed her costume.

The only color about her glowed in her cheeks and in the big, heavily lashed eyes.

When Ray appeared she greeted Jack effusively, and he, while he congratulated her upon the success of her toilet, could not help comparing her, mentally, to a pretty little song and dance *artiste*, with her tinted eyes and the mass of fluffy yellow hair drawn low over her forehead. She wore a long, dark red cloak over a heavily beaded black silk dress, and a big flaring hat

covered with feathers. Her skirts were just short enough to show the heels of her French shoes. Jack noticed that she had his flowers pinned conspicuously just above her left breast, while Georgie wore a big bunch of white violets, a few of which Lee also had in his button-hole. He looked from one to the other and drew his own conclusions. Then, on the way down stairs, he asked Ray, pointing to the two in front of him, if there was "anything between them." But she, remembering that she was bound to secrecy, merely put her finger to her lips with a mysterious little smile, and replied:

"I know nothing, absolutely nothing. But she refused flatly to wear the flowers you sent."

"Indeed? Well, at any rate you were not so unkind," he murmured.

"No, I adore flowers, and thought it very clever of you to send these."

They found the sleigh with its waving plumes and tinyling bells, drawn by two beautiful white horses, awaiting them at the entrance. It took about two minutes to tuck the girls carefully in, take up the reins, and start off.

It was a perfect night, clear and cold; the moon was about three-quarters full, and as she

sailed along in the heavens, she would occasionally veil her fair face in the clouds which floated toward her. Then, as if repenting of her unkindness, she would suddenly burst forth again, smiling and bright, to gladden old earth afresh, with her loveliness.

They passed Delmonico's and the Brunswick, with their crowds of hungry mortals waiting more or less patiently to be fed; the Windsor, with its brilliantly lighted windows; the Cathedral, with its throng of worshipers, who were just coming out after service, and then turned into the park, where Jack gave the horses their heads. Finally, after a lively spin, they drew up at Mount St. Vincent with an extra flourish of the whip and a shout from the man at the door.

"Now, what shall we have in the way of an appetizer?" asked Jack, gayly, when they were seated at the table reserved for their use.

"A little Bourbon for me," replied Lee.

"And for me," chimed in Ray. "It's the best thing to take after such a cold ride."

"What are you going to take?" he asked once more, turning to Georgie.

"Some sherry, please."

"If you take my advice you'll try something

a trifle stronger, a little brandy or whisky; really, it will warm you up," he urged, "and you must be chilled through."

"No, the sherry will be enough. Wait, though, tell him to put a little bitters in it."

"That's better," laughed Jack, "and you may bring me some absinthe."

"Absinthe?" repeated Ray. "Do you know I think I'll change my mind and take some, too,"

"Don't, it's abominable stuff to begin to drink," remarked Lee, with a shudder. "It ruins your nerves in a very short time. Stick to the whisky, Ray, and leave absinthe alone."

"I know all about it; I saw loads of it drunk in Paris, and have always been crazy to taste it," she answered, shortly. "This once won't hurt me."

So the two glasses of absinthe were brought and drank.

Everybody, apparently, was in excellent spirits, and the dinner passed off swimmingly.

Georgie was unusually bright and animated, while Ray was fairly overflowing with jovial spirits. Some good stories were told and enjoyed; some mutual friends discussed, and a large quantity of eatables and drinkables was disposed of.

Once, Jack, forgetting himself, addressed Miss Wheatley by her first name, and then seeing his mistake, colored and stopped short. But she only smiled and assured him that no harm was done. Nevertheless he was more careful after that.

While dressing that afternoon, Georgie had come across the ring which she had bought for Ray, and until then, forgotten all about. She had picked it up, intending to carry it to her at once, when suddenly, at the recollection of the conversation of the night before, she had stopped short.

"No," she had said, quietly, slipping it on her own finger, "I won't give it to her; if she had shown the least particle of generosity or consideration toward me, I would be only too happy to make her a present. But I won't do it, feeling as I do toward her."

At dessert Jack's eye fell upon the ring, and while admiring it, managed to say in a low tone, so that the others, who were discussing a recent wedding, might not hear:

"Have you forgotten the time when *my* ring encircled that little finger?"

"I'm sure I hope so," she responded, cheerfully.

"Haven't you? There is no reason why either of us should remember so much unpleasantness."

"No reason?" he echoed, looking at her with speaking eyes. "Perhaps not. But we cannot all stifle our thoughts. And as for the 'unpleasantness,' I give you my word I've never known such happiness since, and never expect to again."

"Don't say that. There are years of happiness in store for you yet, I hope."

"Not like that."

"More lasting, at any rate, I trust," she responded, a little sarcastically. Then, seeing that the others were listening, she continued, indifferently, "but I'm delighted to hear you say so, for I know you are a good judge of diamonds."

"Oh, that lovely ring," exclaimed Ray, noticing it now, for the first time, "the very one I've been longing for. When did you get it?"

"I bought it yesterday."

"The luck of some people is simply sickening, I declare," Ray went on; "I would have given my head for that ring, and here this girl, who probably doesn't care whether she loses it or not, gets it without any trouble."

"It's beautiful," observed Lee, examining it.

"Of course it is," uttered Ray, "and cost a beautiful sum, too. Did you ever see such a magnificent sapphire? Here, take it away, or I shall certainly die of envy."

"Cognac, madam?" murmured a voice at Mrs. Thorne's elbow.

She nodded.

Lee, half-jokingly, snatched her glass, declaring that he would not permit her to take anything more, as he knew she had had enough to drink.

"Pray, mind your own affairs, my dear fellow, will you?" she returned, pertly. "Evidently you don't know my capacity. Here goes mine, and to prove to you that I'm not so shallow as I may look, here goes yours as well." And she suited the action to the word, making a little mouth at his expression of disapproval.

They lingered in the dining-room half an hour longer, during which Ray, who was by far the merriest of the four, devoted almost her whole attention to Jack; while he, having drunk just enough to make everything appear *colour de rose*, smiled indulgently upon her, and accepted her devotion very good-humoredly.

As they were putting on their wraps, Mr. Nelson was told that his coachman wished to speak to him.

"Well, Brewster, what is it?" he asked of the man.

"If you please, sir, the mare struck herself coming up, and her foot is that sore I'm afraid it would hurt her to drive her back."

"Is that so?" said Jack. "What are we to do, then, at this hour? We can't walk, you know."

"The stable man says you can have a couple of broughams he has, sir, which is all he can give you to-night."

"Very well, then, tell him to get them ready directly, as we have no choice. But it's too bad, as our drive up was delightful."

How to pair off was the next question, but that was decided by Lee, who thought it wiser to have a man in each carriage in case of accident.

"One never knows the condition of these drivers," said he, "especially on a cold night."

So when the carriages came around, Mr. Grant got in with Georgie, leaving Ray and Jack to go together.

Lee, occupied with his own thoughts, which, by the way, were none too pleasant, was silent

for a while, and it was not until they were nearly out of the park that he spoke. Then, rousing himself to ask some trivial question, he was startled at the expression of Georgie's face. She was pale as death, and there were lines of pain about her mouth as deep as if she had been suffering agony for days.

"Why, my darling," he began, but she turned her head away from him. He tried to take her hand, but with no better success; she drew it away, and moved as far from him as possible. Then he put his arm around her and drew her to him, gently. She struggled for an instant, but seeing that he was the stronger, she yielded, and hiding her face on his shoulder, suddenly burst into wild sobs. He tried to soothe her as one would a little child, wiping away the tears, and stroking her forehead and hair. He could feel her trembling and shuddering from head to foot, while deep sighs shook her whole frame.

"Don't, don't go on so, Georgie," he begged, "or you'll make yourself ill. Calm yourself a little. It pains me to see you so distressed."

At last, worn out with weeping, she threw herself back and cried, as if in sheer agony of spirit:

"Oh, Lee, I'm so unhappy, I'm so unhappy!"

I have heard it said that there comes a time in the life of each one of us when we are called upon to make some great sacrifice or to bear some heavy burden, and that the spirit in which we respond colors all our future, and gives the finishing touch to our characters. It decides whether we are to be strong or weak; generous or selfish; good or bad. In fact, it is the turning point in our lives.

I do not know how true this statement may be, or how erroneous, but I do know that Lee Grant felt this to be the bitterest moment he had ever experienced.

A man of few words; fewer friendships; strong in his likes and dislikes, he had gone through life until the past few months heart-whole, and almost fancy-free. But when Georgie had crossed his path all had been changed, and the love which he lavished upon her almost frightened him at times, so absolutely did it fill his whole being. He trembled as he thought, what if she should die and leave him? How much harder it would be for him than for a younger man, with whom fancy is so often mistaken for affection. Or, if some one should win her from him? And now he believed his worst fear was about to be

realized. He felt crushed and pained beyond expression, yet even at this time his own grief was swallowed up in pity for her.

"I know you are, my dearest," he answered, "I knew it all the evening. I could see it in your face even while you were laughing and talking. It was an awful strain on your nerves, wasn't it? You must have suffered tortures. I watched you all the time, expecting to see you break down, but you were so brave through it all."

"Oh, Lee," she repeated, piteously, "forgive me, but you don't understand—I am so wretched, so miserable. I thought it was all over, and that he couldn't hurt me any more, and now," choking down a sob, "I feel as if my heart is broken. Yes, it is, Lee. What have I done that I should be made to suffer so? And all through her, too, the woman I trusted and loved. It's too cruel!"

"My dear girl, I do understand, and I sympathize with you from my heart. But when you have lived as many years as I have, you'll find that it is our best friends who can hurt us the most, and who often seem to take the greatest delight in doing it."

"But how could she, under my very eyes, when I asked her; I told her——"

"She's not accountable for what she does to-night," he interrupted, unhesitatingly.

"And Jack, how could he subject me to such humiliation? To talk to and look at her as he did; oh, it was too shameful! If he had wanted to be with her, why couldn't he be decent about it and wait until he could see her alone, some time?"

"I don't blame him so much. You know men always take their cue from the women they are talking with," replied Lee. "Her weak point is love of admiration. He soon discovered that, and spent the evening in flattering her. But she went entirely too far. So," with a slight tremor in his voice, "you see, after all, you love him still."

She was silent for a few moments, then she replied, hopelessly:

"I don't know. I only feel as if I had suddenly either gone mad or come to my senses. I thought, honestly, I had forgotten him and could meet him again without feeling of any kind, but you see how it is. Do I love him, do I hate him; I don't know I'm sure. I only know that no man ever had the power to wound me as he has."

"Yes," said Lee, a little bitterly, "you care for

him as you will never be able to care for any one else, and if he came to you to-morrow and said 'come,' you would go. You see I judged you rightly when I said you were capable of but one affection, and that that would be a lasting one. I only regret, selfishly perhaps, that I was not the man to inspire that passion."

"Oh, Lee, forgive me. As I live, I hoped and believed it was all, all over, when I met you. I thought this second love of mine would be better, more complete, than the first. Do believe me. You must suffer as much as I do. Oh, that miserable dinner, if it had never been proposed, we might have been happy still."

"Hush, my child. I've nothing to forgive, and I do believe you. You've done nothing wrong," he answered, kissing the hand he held. "I shall always love you, yes, to my dying day. But you know the 'second love', as you call it, of a woman like you, is not worth *that*."

"You're so good and generous," she murmured, "far too good for me."

"We'll talk about that another time," he said softly. "But now, my dear, compose yourself, for we are almost home, and they mustn't see tears in your eyes."

"But, Lee, promise me, promise me," she pleaded, "that you won't leave me; I shouldn't know what to do without you, really. You believe I love you, don't you? See, I'm quite myself again, only it upset me so just at first. But I feel better now, and I hope you won't go away from me."

He was really alarmed by her nervous hysterical manner, and so he quieted her as well as he could until the carriage stopped in front of the hotel.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGIE'S FAREWELL NOTE.

They found Ray and Jack already up stairs.

She had thrown herself into the nearest chair, and he stood leaning against the mantel. She was idly pulling her flowers to pieces as they came in.

"Only think, my dear," she began in a loud voice, "we actually got back safe and sound, much to my surprise, for I fully expected to be dashed into 'kingdom come,' twenty times before we reached here. The way that man drove was a caution. Rattlety-bang on this side, rattlety-bang on that, at the rate of fifty knots an hour. I never went so fast in my life. It was ridiculous to attempt to drive through the snow, perfectly absurd. Sleighs are ever so much nicer and far less dangerous. Have you any objection to my indulging in a cigarette, cherie? You know I haven't had one to-day, and Mr. Nelson says he thinks it very cute for a woman to smoke, if she

does it gracefully, and I learned in Russia. Let me see, was it Russia or Prussia? Really I've forgotten. But what are you all staring at me so for? Especially you, Mr. Jack? You——"

"Ray," interrupted Georgie.

But she waved her back majestically.

"Hold your tongue, will you, Miss Impertinence? You've interfered with me quite enough, lately," she went on savagely. "As for you, Mr. Jack, you would oblige me by turning those orbs of yours in another direction; you positively frighten me when you stare so; by the way, did either of you ever notice what big eyes he has? Just like an owl's, and when he fixes them on you, ugh; they fairly make you dizzy. At any rate, they affect me so. There, he's doing it again; make him stop, please, for my head is going around. No, it's the room, after all, or the chandelier, I don't know which, but stop it, won't you? I can't see."

And she covered her face with her hands.

Lee caught Georgie's eye and led her to the other side of the room.

"Can you get her off to bed?" he whispered.

"I suppose so," she replied, "if you and Jack

will go at once. But what under the sun is the matter with her?"

"Of course. You see it's as I said, the absinthe was a little more than she could stand."

"It's dreadful," she remarked quietly. "I wonder what Jack thinks?"

"He looks as if he thought it were funny, and so I suppose it is, or would be if it was somebody else. If she had only waited now, until we were alone, before she tried the experiments of mixing drinks, as she did to-night. But of course she would have her own way, and may have to pay dearly for it."

"How?" asked Georgie, anxiously.

"She'll feel like the mischief to-morrow, and then have the 'blues' for a week. But we can't stand talking here; she's looking at us now. Do you really think you can get along all right? Hadn't I better send for Annette?"

"Not for the world. I would rather spare her the humiliation of having her maid see her under such circumstances. I can manage her quite well alone. Don't worry."

"You know I return to Philadelphia to-morrow," he continued.

"And I to R——"

"I may come to see you soon?"

She dropped her eyes.

"Do you wish to?" she asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"What a question!"

"Very well. Come whenever you like, only be sure and let me know beforehand. Write to me, anyway, won't you? I shall be so uneasy until I hear from you."

"I will; but why should you be worried? You may depend upon it, my feelings toward you will never change," he answered, reassuringly.

"Ah," she responded, shaking her head sadly, "you can't tell. Things look very different in broad daylight from what they do at night, and I don't see how you can care for me after this."

When she returned to Ray, after bidding the two men good-night, she found her with her head thrown back, half asleep.

"Are you ready to go to your room now?" she asked, shaking her a little to rouse her.

"What do you want? Go away and let me alone," answered Ray, crossly.

"But you can't stay here all night, you know."

"Why can't I? Go to bed yourself, if you like, but I'm going to stay here."

And she settled herself for another nap.

"My dear, you really must come," persisted Georgie, "or I shall have to call Annette. You never could undress yourself to-night."

Ray sprang up with as much indignation as she could muster at that moment.

"What do you mean? I suppose you wish to imply that I can't see straight. Well, may be I can't; but, all the same, I don't choose to be insulted. I can get along as well as you," starting toward her room with uncertain steps. "Take your arm away." Then, overcome by a sudden dizziness, she put her hand to her head again, and would have fallen if it had not been for Georgie.

"After all," she admitted, a little more amiably, "I don't think I am able to do much for myself; so you'll help me, won't you? I can't imagine what ails me." And she allowed herself to be undressed, quite meekly, watching Georgie's movements with a dull, stupid air, and as soon as the gas was out she fell into a deep, heavy sleep.

Georgie's esteem for Ray had received its death blow, and she was now thoroughly disgusted with her. How any woman, who pretended to be a lady, could so far forget herself as she had was beyond her comprehension, and as she made her own

preparations for the night, she could not repress a feeling of shame that she had been in her society when she had made such a spectacle of herself.

She sent for Annette and told her that her mistress was ill, and on no account to wake her in the morning, even to give her her breakfast.

"When she wants you she will ring," she said. "And, by the way, in case I do not see her before I go away—I expect to go home to-morrow—tell her I left a note on her bureau; you will find it there."

Then she packed her clothes, declining the maid's proffered assistance, and spent the night (what remained of it) lying across the bed, trying to compose herself and sleep a little. But her pulses were throbbing, and her cheeks burning so, that she found it impossible even to rest. She tossed feverishly from side to side until the first bars of light came in between her curtains, when she dressed, and, after drinking a little coffee, wrote her farewell note to Ray, who was still wrapped in silent slumber. She did not address it, saying what she had to say simply, and in a very few words, as follows:

Thursday Morning,
HOFFMAN HOUSE.

Everything is at an end between us. I do not

feel as if I ever wished to see or hear from you again. I think you will understand, and it would pain me to explain. Forgive me if I seem cruel, but I cannot forget.

GEORGIE.

This she laid on her dressing-table, and then, without so much as looking toward the bed, from which she could hear Ray's low, quiet breathing, she left the room and the hotel.

When my lady awoke, it was with a dull, tired feeling, and a strange buzzing in her ears.

She felt for her watch under the pillow, but it was not there. Then she spied it on her dressing-table, and, upon looking at it, found the hands pointed to twelve o'clock.

"I must have forgotten to wind it last night," she thought. But no, when she held it up to her ear it was ticking as placidly as usual.

"Then Annette must have gone out and forgotten to awake me," she decided, and forthwith proceeded to ring the bell.

Almost instantly the maid appeared, bearing a delicate breakfast on a tray.

"What do you mean, you stupid, by letting me sleep until this hour?" she cried, angrily. "You know I had to go to the dressmaker's at eleven o'clock."

"Pardon, madam," replied the poor woman, looking confusedly at her mistress, "but Miss Wheatley told me not to wake you this morning, as you were ill last evening."

"Miss Wheat——" she began, and then stopped, struck suddenly with the remembrance of the night before.

A dim recollection of how she had behaved at table came to her, and a sharp, darting pain across her eyes helped to bring the rest of the evening's events clearly to her mind.

"Miss Wheatley was quite right, after all," she rejoined, more mildly. "I had forgotten, I fainted at dinner, and she put me to bed. It's too provoking, though, as I ought to have gone to be fitted. How the old woman will rage! You'll have to go up there right away and explain to her, or else send a messenger. Is Miss Wheatley out?"

"Miss Wheatley went away this morning, madam."

"Where, do you know?"

"Home, she say."

Mrs. Thorne stared blankly at her.

"Home," she echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, madam, Miss Wheatley pack her things

last night and say she go home this morning."

Ray was thankful that the room was not light enough for the maid to see the flush which dyed her face and neck at this statement. She composed herself as quickly as possible, however, and said, indifferently:

"I'm sorry she had to go before I was up. I knew she was going some time to-day, still I had hoped to see her to say good-by. But come, now, help me to dress, and give me my breakfast, for I'm as hungry as a bear."

She spoke quietly, even cheerfully, but inwardly she was boiling. She toyed with her food, but could not swallow a mouthful. There was a lump in her throat, and a mist before her eyes.

Presently she asked, in a casual sort of way:

"Did Miss Wheatley leave no word for me, Annette?"

"She leave a note, madam, on your table."

"Ah! Bring it to me, and then go and get me a pencil. I want to send a telegram."

In reality she wanted to be alone, and when the door had closed on the heels of the faithful Annette, she turned the key, and with trembling fingers tore open the note.

She read it through breathlessly, and then laid it down, pale with rage and shame.

"How could she? I hate her, I hate her, the heartless little prude!" she muttered, with closed teeth.

Hearing the maid's returning footsteps, she tossed it hastily into a drawer and unlocked the door.

There was nothing left for her to do but to go home, as it would look most foolish for her to linger here any longer alone. Accordingly she ordered Annette to make all preparations, and in another hour they were seated in a cab on their way to Desbrosses street.

A fine, drizzling rain was falling when they reached Philadelphia, soaking everything and causing the melting snow to run in dirty streams down the street or form itself into muddy, lead-colored puddles in the middle of the sidewalk. Roofs dripped dismally, and wet, umbrella-bearing pedestrians jostled each other on every side.

"Carriage, lady, carriage?"

"For goodness sake, let's get out of this," exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, making her way between the rows of scraping cabmen. "It's like running the gantlet."

She selected a hansom as being the highest and driest vehicle in sight, and threw herself wearily into it.

"Is your master at home?" she asked of the butler, when the front door was opened.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he get my telegram?"

"I believe he did, ma'am. Leastways one came for him a little while ago, and he says to me 'Tell Mrs. Thorne I'm in the library and would like to see her as soon as she gets home.'"

But Mrs. Thorne made no haste to obey the summons of her lord and master; she proceeded leisurely up to her room, where she changed her bedraggled garments and afterward refreshed herself with a cup of strong tea. Then, having nothing else to do, she went slowly down stairs to the library, where she found her husband engaged in looking over some papers.

This room, which was very large, was preferred by many people, especially Mr. Thorne's particular friends, to any in the house. The furniture was of mahogany, elaborately carved, and the floor of hard wood, covered here and there with the skins of bears, which had, at different times, been brought low by his gun. A pair of superb

antlers just over one of the doors bore testimony to his success in the Adirondack regions. Hundreds of volumes filled the book-cases which hid the walls, and solemn-faced marble busts stared from every nook and corner.

"So you're back again, are you?" was his greeting, as he deposited an apology for a kiss upon her cheek.

"Yes, I'm back," she answered in the same enthusiastic tone. "Did you want to see me about anything particular? Because I'm as tired as a dog, and would like to lie down a little while before dinner, if possible."

"Well, yes, there was one little thing I wanted to tell you about that's happened since you went away," he answered slowly, glancing contemplatively down at his well polished boot.

She questioned him with her eyes.

Mr. Thorne rose to his feet. He was a short, stout man of about fifty, with a rubicund face, and small, sleepy eyes. He had the reputation of being an epicure, and of this he was very proud. He was also considered a great joker, and a good after dinner speaker, which inflated his portly bosom still more. To his wife, however, he was nothing but a gourmand, and

although she smiled appreciatively whenever a *bon mot* of his was applauded, in her heart she thought him an insufferable bore.

"I hardly think you'll be pleased to hear what I have to tell you," he resumed; "in fact I'm sure you won't, but still it remains my painful duty——"

Mrs. Thorne tapped the table impatiently, though she turned a little pale at the same time, for her husband did not often waste words with her.

"Come to the point, please," she said coldly; "I can't stay here all night."

CHAPTER XIII.

"THEN WE ARE POOR."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," he replied briskly. "Don't lose your patience, there's plenty of time, and, as I say, my news is none too pleasant," and he looked slyly at her from under his short stubby lashes.

"Then the sooner it's over the better."

"True enough. Well, to come to the point, as you say, you will remember, my love, I had a lot of money in with Lane, Streete & Co.?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well—but didn't you see the morning papers?"

"No," growing still paler.

"Then you don't know anything about it, and the blow will be all the harder for you. Ahem, to speak plainly, Lane, Streete & Co. went up yesterday."

"And—" she uttered, clutching the table for support.

"And of course I'm just so much out."

"But you didn't have so very much in it."

Mr. Thorne took out his pen-knife and opened it.

"That's the worst of it, my dear, I didn't until last month, when I foolishly put almost everything I had in it. You see I thought I might double my fortune, but unfortunately, I lose more instead. I can wait and try over again, I suppose. Things may run my way perhaps, some day."

She sank trembling into a chair.

"Is everything gone?" she gasped.

"Pretty nearly."

"How can you be so cool about it?"

"What's the use of crying over spilt milk? Besides, we both enjoyed it while it lasted, and there's no sense in complaining over what you can't help."

Her hands fell to her sides, nerveless.

"Then we are poor?" she whispered, with white lips.

"That's about it, my girl, poor, poor, poor; can you realize it?" he replied, showing his teeth in a disagreeable smile. "But of course you can, as you had never tasted the pleasures of riches when I married you. If it hadn't been for me you would doubtless be teaching school some-

where to-day, wouldn't you? I was a good fellow to give you a boost, eh?"

"Yes, about as good as a person is who leads another to the top of a high cliff and then pushes him off," she retorted, with quiet scorn.

"Come now, don't be ungenerous, Ray, you certainly have lived on the fat of the land for years, and you ought not to complain because you have at last come to the end of the rope."

But she did not even hear his words.

"Tell me, will we have to leave this house?"

"Yes, and give up the horses and servants. Have you any idea what it costs to run an establishment like this? I should judge not, indeed. Well, it costs about four times as much as my income will be in the future."

"How long have you known about this?"

"You mean the failure?"

"Yes."

"I knew it was liable to occur at any time, about a week ago, but like the rest of the fools connected with the business, I didn't believe things were in so bad a shape as they were. So when the blow came, although of course, it shocked me, I was not altogether unprepared for it."

"And you never spoke of it to me," she managed to articulate.

He looked up from the nail he was paring.

"What was the use, my dear? You know I have talked to you time and time and again about your extravagance, but to what purpose? I might as well have remonstrated with a graven image."

"But if you had mentioned ruin," she murmured, with a bewildered air.

He closed his knife with a snap.

"You would have laughed at me and said I was trying to frighten you. No, my only treasure, don't rake up the past and find fault with it; let us turn our attention rather to what the future holds for us. You won't leave your loving husband, now that misfortune has overtaken him, will you? But it would be just like you to desert the sinking ship. I don't believe you'll have grit enough to stick by me when you know you will have to get along with one gown a season, and consider yourself lucky to get that. The love of dress——"

"In Heaven's name, stop," she cried, vehemently. "How can you stand there and talk so to me? It is such monsters as you who drive

women to recklessness and ruin. You say I have been extravagant, and perhaps I have, but you—have you been more prudent? If I've made an idol of my person, you have made one of your stomach, but there has been this difference between us: I have clothed only myself, while you have fed half the clubs in town. If you had shown a disposition to save, from the beginning, be very sure I should have followed your example. But did you? Look at your card parties, your fast horses, your wine suppers, before you cry out against me. 'As the husband is the wife is' has been only too well proven in our case, and if ever a woman had a 'clown' for a husband, that woman has been myself."

His sleepy eyes lighted up for the first time with a little show of interest.

"'Pon my soul, my dear," he exclaimed, mockingly. "I didn't know you were such a fluent talker; you'd make quite an actress, I do believe. Why don't you go on the stage and turn an honest dollar to help your husband along, instead of wasting your talents by standing there and abusing him like a thief?"

She made no reply to this speech, delivered as it was, in an insulting tone; she turned from him

haughtily, and swept from the room with the air of an injured queen.

But once in her own chamber, her proud head drooped, and finding herself alone, she sank cowering upon the floor, moaning: "Oh, how can I give it all up? I cannot, I cannot; it would kill me."

Then she looked helplessly at her little white hands, with their delicate pink nails.

"What's to become of me? What can I do? Can I endure to have the people who consider it an honor to entertain me now, turn up their noses at me? Or, worse still, can I stand being boxed up in a little bit of a place, with perhaps one slipshod maid-of-all-work, and with a man whom I loathe, for a companion? No, a thousand times no."

She arose and walked slowly through the length and breadth of her apartments; then she went softly down stairs, and passed through the superb parlors and drawing-rooms, looking at and touching everything in a reverent, half-unconscious way, with a mournful smile on her lips. What pride she had taken in her entertainments; in knowing that her reputation as a hostess had traveled far and wide; that people

came to go through her house as they would go through an art gallery; that her china and bric-a-brac were worth their weight in gold! And now it was all over, and she must soon sink into utter oblivion and insignificance—forgotten after a short nine days. Scarcely realizing what she did, she returned to her dressing-room and pulled out all her jewels. She held them up to the light, fondling and kissing them as if they had been living creatures, able to respond to her caresses. Woman-like, what crushed her most was the thought of parting with her ornaments. She sat on the floor with them in her lap, bewailing her fate, and weeping, for an hour. Must she give them up, too? Was there no way of saving them? They represented thousands of dollars, and when she was decked in them she felt like an empress. She might run away and take them with her, but then, what would one in her circumstances do with diamonds? She might better sell them and buy bread. And at this reflection she laughed a little, bitterly.

How was she going to support herself? She knew she was incapable of teaching any but the very youngest, and she had no patience with children. She might manage to get some insig-

nificant part on the stage, perhaps, but that would require time and money, and she had neither to waste in doubtful experiments. She was determined upon one point, however, and that was, that she would go away alone, without her husband; she would rather work until her fingers were worn to the bone, than spend one hour more than she could possibly help with that brute. It was bad enough to have to endure him in prosperity; in poverty it would be intolerable.

Her cogitations were interrupted by Bijou, who was scratching and whining piteously at the door for admittance. When she let him in he jumped up, half frantic with joy, and tried to lick her face and hands.

For the first time in years, perhaps, she shed a few real unselfish tears at the delight expressed by this little dumb animal, at seeing her again.

"Ah," she said, "here is one at least who loves me honestly and devotedly; as it is worth while being loved. Bijou, my pet, you shall never leave me, no matter what happens. If I have to beg from door to door, you shall always be cared for."

Annette, who was unpacking her mistress'

trunks, knocked presently, as she wished to put some clothes into the wardrobe. Mrs. Thorne told her to come in, and much to the woman's amazement, offered to assist her. She felt as if she would go wild if she had not some occupation for her mind and hands.

"Madam," said the girl, as she deposited a box of gloves on a drawer, "I have found a note among the handkerchiefs which I did not know where to put. Shall I bring it to you?"

"Yes," said Ray, indifferently.

Annette disappeared and returned almost immediately with the letter. It was the one Georgie had left on her bureau the night before. She took it and re-read it mechanically.

What horrible luck she was in, to be sure. Everything seemed to come upon her at once. Here was one to whom she well knew she would not have to apply in vain, had she not forfeited the right to do so. Perhaps, after all, Georgie could be induced to overlook her mishap of the night before. But no, she knew that she was a woman whose yes meant yes, and whose no meant no, and that a friendship with her, once broken, could never be renewed. She would send her a check, beyond a doubt, if she asked

for it, but it would come alone, unaccompanied by a word of any kind.

"I would starve before I would go to her," she muttered, with clenched fists, "the harsh, unforgiving little beast! How she would gloat if she knew my position. I only wish she were in my position and I in hers."

She sat a long time staring at the written words without seeing them, her mind full of melancholy thoughts.

"If I could only get even with her for this. But a toad might just as well try to attack a star. I'm nothing in future but a poor outcast from society, hopeless and friendless, while she, through my own nonsensical management, will step right into my shoes and queen it in my stead. Oh, it's too bitter! If I could only have anticipated events a little—and yet I might, I may—if I dared"—she hesitated, and looked down at the paper again with a half-frightened expression on her face, as if awed at the enormity of her own thoughts. "After all, why should I not? She did me a mean turn, and it's probably my last chance. What if she found it out, though, and came to me? But she won't if I play my cards well. It's worth the risk at any

rate, and a person in my desperate strait must not be too particular as to means."

So saying she went to her desk and wrote the following lines :

DEAR LEE:—I left New York this noon, and reached home about an hour ago.

When I said good-by to Georgie, she gave me the inclosed note, asking me to hand it to you. But as I cannot get out this afternoon, and thinking perhaps it may be important (as lovers' messages generally are), I take this means of getting it to you.

Hoping it contains something very pleasant, and also to see you soon, I am, as ever, R.

Then she carefully sealed up, in a plain envelope, the note she had received from Georgie, and put both into a larger one, upon which she inscribed his name. It was the work of but a moment to ring for the footman and send him away to deliver it, and she did so without faltering.

"It seems a cruel thing to do," she whispered, "but there is no reason why she should have all and I nothing. If Providence arranges things badly, each of us poor mortals must do what we can to make them a little more endurable, even if it affects somebody else."

Dinner was a gloomy meal for her. Served though it was by liveried servants, and upon the finest china, her food was as bitter herbs in her mouth. She had eaten nothing since the day before, and her head was aching painfully; still, she could not force a solid morsel down her throat. She took two spoonfuls of soup, and trifled with a piece of fish, but it was an exertion for her to swallow, so she gave up trying in disgust, and sat back in her chair watching her husband empty his plates, with an expression of contempt upon her face.

"You seem to have an excellent appetite," she remarked, sweetly.

"Yes, my dear, I never allow anything to interfere with my meals," he returned, helping himself a second time to terrapin. "But you're not playing a very good knife and fork to-night. What's the matter? aren't you well? 'Eat, drink and be merry,' you know. It applies very well in our case, doesn't it?" and he poured out a glass of champagne with a little giggle.

"What I can't understand," she began, when the servant had left the room, "is, how you manage to take this so coolly. You say you are ruined, and yet you can sit here and joke as if

nothing more serious than the death of one of your horses had occurred. In fact, you were a great deal more affected, apparently, when 'Max' died last summer. What is it? bravado? If it is, you're making a fool of yourself, and Heaven help me when your courage leaves you."

"You misunderstood me, my love; I never said I was ruined; I said I was poor, and so I am, comparatively; but I still have enough to live on comfortably and respectably, yes, and a little to risk now and again, too, if I feel inclined. For the next few years, however, we must economize, and get along without a great many things we have now. You won't be able to play the fine lady, as you've been doing for some time past, nor——"

She interrupted him impatiently.

"Do you suppose," she asked, with a curling lip, "that I'm going to stay with you and be a housemaid? If you do, you're mightily mistaken."

"Really? And what does *Madame la Princesse* intend to do, if I may ask?"

"I don't know yet. But anything rather than slave for you. I don't mean this unkindly, but

I actually *could not* stand passing the rest of my life in poverty with you. I should die."

"Your truthfulness is surpassed only by your extreme good manners, my dear," sneered her husband, in his most offensive tone. "But do as you like, I beg; I wouldn't have you incommode yourself for anything, though perhaps that advice is superfluous, as you generally do do that. I may, then, have the pleasure of seeing you some fine day parading around one of our shops in the role of a 'tryer on,' I suppose, or, better still, of beholding you in one of our theaters exhibiting your faultless figure to the Philadelphia swells at a dollar fifty per head. Well, you will carry my best wishes with you, of course, though, I must say, I think you are making me a very poor return for picking you out of the mud."

"You never picked me out of the mud," she cried, the hot blood rushing to her cheeks, "and you're a coward to say so."

"Of course I'm not speaking literally, you ought to know that," he answered, in tones which he pretended to make soothing, but which, in reality exasperated her more than ever, "but candidly now, where would you be if it wasn't

for me, or rather, for the money I had when you married me? Living with 'mamma' somewhere in the backwoods, more than likely waiting upon yourself; not riding around in seal-skins and diamonds."

"There were others—" she retorted.

"Then I wish to the heavens above they had you," he interrupted, savagely, jumping up from the table. "And now, since we're on the subject, I may as well be as frank as you've been, and show as much consideration for you as you did for me. If you've run up any big bills in New York, let me tell you I won't pay them. No, not one cent will I give you for any confounded milliners or dressmakers down there, and if any come in, I'll put you out of the house, neck and crop the next minute, do you understand? I will, so help me Jupiter." And he shook his fat forefinger at her threateningly and left the room.

"Then, if that's so, we might as well say good-by now," she called out, laughing scornfully, "for depend upon it, you'll get some terrors."

But she wasted her breath for he had gone into the library, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE REQUEST.

Three days after this, Peter Persuade was ushered into the joint presence of Mrs. Clarke and her niece, whose day it was to receive.

As he usually strolled in every Saturday, nobody paid particular attention to him, so he seated himself in one corner of the drawing-room, where he could see everybody, and made himself perfectly at home. He invariably carried his hat in his hand, and any one, upon examining it, would be very apt to find a lump of chewing-gum stuck inside of the crown. He was always well-dressed, and looked every inch a gentleman, though he would tell you in the most cheerful manner imaginable, if you asked him, that he had not a dollar in the world outside of his salary, and a small sum which his mother, who was blessed with plenty of the all needful, allowed him monthly.

He took a mischievous delight in hearing women chat with each other, old ones, especially,

and would sit for hours listening to them, and leading them slyly on to gossip, until their tongues got wagging in a manner that would have surprised even themselves, had they realized the mischief they were making.

Georgie used to scold him for this, but he would immediately assume an expression of injured innocence, and vow that he did no such thing, and that moreover, he never in his life had come across such a set of scandal-mongers as met weekly at her house. Of course she would wax highly indignant at his impertinence, and threaten to throw him out of the house by the ears, the next time he called.

Mrs. Clarke, who was a good-hearted, fussy old soul, was very fond of him, and never thought of making a change anywhere about the house until she had first asked his opinion on the subject.

"You know Peter is just like a woman around," she would observe, "and I declare he knows more about my household affairs than I do myself."

On the day in question he lingered until after everyone else was gone, and then accepted Mrs.

Clarke's invitation to dine and spend the evening.

"May be it will brighten Georgie up if you stay," she said, "for I can't think what to do with her, she's been so mopish ever since she came back from New York; she must have been on the go too much. You know I never did approve altogether of Mrs. Thorne, she's so frivolous."

"She's all right, auntie," uttered Georgie, reprovingly.

"Of course, I don't doubt she is," pursued the old lady; "but nevertheless she's wonderfully fond of gadding about for a married woman."

"But surely that's her own affair," said Georgie again.

"Yes, I know it is," admitted Mrs. Clarke; "but if she does such things she must expect to be talked about, mustn't she, Peter?"

"Certainly, and if she was my wife I would treat her as I would a naughty child—box her ears and put her to bed until she learned better," replied Peter, severely.

"If she was your wife, my dear boy, she would do exactly as she pleased," laughed Georgie; "you wouldn't get time to look after her."

"By the way," remarked Mrs. Clarke, suddenly,

"I meant to tell you I met Mrs. Upton at Mrs. Henderson's yesterday, and she says that her sister is almost dead about Jack. You know," lowering her voice to a stage whisper, that it might not reach the ears of John Henry, who was removing the tea-things, "he is living in New York now and is very sweet on some widow he met there. A most ordinary sort of person, but he fancies her so much, nevertheless, that they say he is actually going to marry her. She pretends to be wonderfully proper, and is always going to church. But I was told that she used to be an actress. Besides, they say he bets on horse races. Isn't it a shame? And he with such prospects, too! The worst of it is, Mrs. Upton says the Nelsons blame this poor child for it, and say that if she had treated him right he never would have been different. The idea!" witheringly. "Did you ever hear anything so unjust? As if she could govern him! I'm only glad and thankful she didn't marry him. Is that you, Katie? I'll be there directly. Well, I'll see you at dinner, Peter." And the old lady bustled out of the room, after the housekeeper.

The two sat silent for a few moments after Mrs.

Clarke had left them, and then Georgie said, interrogatively:

"You received my note, I suppose?"

"Doesn't my presence testify to that fact?" replied Peter. "And now I am awaiting your orders."

"Peter," she said, suddenly clasping her hands and looking at him pleadingly, "you won't refuse to do me a favor, will you?"

"No, of course I won't."

"Even if I make what seems to you a strange request?"

"What are you driving at? Out with it."

"Well, Peter, you know where this widow is living, don't you?"

"N-no, not exactly; but I could easily find out, I suppose. Why?"

"I wish you would, and then—I want you to take me there."

"Why, what are you thinking of? You don't know her, and it would be out of the question to take you there," returned Peter.

"No, it wouldn't; I want to see her very particularly, and, Peter, I *must* go; if you don't take me somebody else shall. I mean what I say."

"But you heard what your aunt just said—she's a very ordinary sort of person."

"That makes no difference. Will you take me?"

"I will not," promptly.

"Peter, do be nice——"

"I *am* nice."

"No, you aren't. Peter," coaxingly, "do you remember that black-bear rug you admired so much at Pelt's last month?"

An indifferent shrug of the shoulders was the only reply she received.

"And those link sleeve-buttons we saw at Tiffany's when I was buying the pin for auntie?" she continued.

"Yes," he answered, weakly.

"Well, those will both find their way to fifty-four, if you will do this one little bit of a thing for me."

"No," he said, shaking his head vigorously, "you must not ask me, I really can't do it. Why, it's absurd, preposterous! You don't even know the woman, as I say."

But she saw that she had gained her point already, and she went on:

"After all, you're a dear, good fellow, and shall

have your reward. Truly," with a sigh of relief, "you never did a kinder action in your life than this."

"I haven't said I would yet, and—tell me what you want of her?"

"You will, though," she returned, "but I can't tell you what I want of her. Are you sure you can find out the address? Be here on Monday at three o'clock, and we'll go then."

As he was leaving that night she managed to tell him, while her aunt was in another part of the room, that she would expect him, rain or shine.

"Well, of course I won't disappoint you, as you've evidently set your heart on going," he said, "and I don't suppose there's any great impropriety in taking you there. Only it's very foolish, for I've half an idea that you are going to talk about Jack to her, and if so you'll be making a big mistake, I think. Still, as I say, I won't refuse you."

"Don't," she pleaded.

"But, all the same, I hate like fury to take you, and if Mrs. Clarke ever heard about it she'd be awfully put out. In fact, she might not welcome

me the next time I called, and she'd be quite right, too."

"I would see about that," replied Georgie. "This is my house, you must remember, and I say you'll always be welcome, *particularly* next Monday at three o'clock."

"You'd show much more sense, Georgie, if you'd give up this absurd notion and spend that afternoon with Grant. He's dead spoons on you, and he's worth a score of Jack Nelsons."

She flushed slightly.

"I prefer to go with you," she answered, coldly, "so don't say anything more about it, please. Besides, although Lee Grant is, of course, very pleasant, I've no reason to believe he's any more sincere than—the other?"

On Monday, when he came for her he found her waiting impatiently for him.

"You're late," she cried, running out into the hall to meet him, "and now we can only take the 3:30 train. Make haste, we've no time to lose. I told auntie I was going out to dine with you, so it's all right."

"Before we start, Georgie, I wish you would tell me what you want of this woman. I'm so afraid you'll get in trouble with her," he began afresh.

But she turned a deaf ear, as before, and hurried him to the railroad station.

"She's living in a flat," he announced, as they rattled up Broadway in a cab, "and so there will perhaps be less danger of any one's seeing you, which will be a blessing, as she's decidedly not of your set. She's the widow of a butcher, or something vulgar."

"Stop your grumbling, you old grandfather," she exclaimed, putting her hand playfully over his mouth, "you do worry so about trifles! Pray, who's to see me, and what of it if they do? Am I so well known in the streets of New York that I cannot make a friendly call if I like? No one will know anything about it, though, not even Jack."

"I'm not at all sure about that, for I suppose she tells him everything, and it isn't likely she'll omit this."

"Well, I shall bind her to secrecy, at any rate, and then trust to her honor. That's all any one can do."

He shrugged his shoulders in dismay.

"But what if you meet him there?" he asked.

"I've chosen an hour when he will surely not be there," she replied, "and I won't stay very

long; so be patient. By the way, you didn't tell me her name?"

"Mrs. Kirkendale."

They alighted before a large brown stone apartment house, and after climbing two flights of stairs, rang the bell on one side of a door bearing the name "Kirkendale" on a narrow silver plate.

A trim little servant answered it, and informed them that Mrs. Kirkendale was not at home, but that she expected her any moment.

"Then I think I'll wait a little while," replied Georgie, promptly.

"All right," said Peter, "you go in, and I'll come back in half an hour. Will that be soon enough?"

Georgie thought it would, and then stepped into the parlor.

"Excuse, me, sir, I thought you had gone," stammered the girl, flushing with consternation, as a man rose from the sofa, which was partially hidden by a screen, and regarded them questioningly.

"It makes no difference," he observed, composedly, "I——"

But the rest of his sentence was never finished,

for he sat staring in front of him as if he had seen a ghost.

"Georgie!"

"Jack!"

"What on earth ever brought you here?" he asked, as if he doubted his own eyes.

"I didn't expect to see you," she answered, faltering.

"No? Are you then acquainted with Mrs. Kirkendale?"

"No."

"Then," he went on, dismissing by a motion the servant, who, devoured by curiosity, was still lingering, "how did you find the house?"

"Never mind how I found it—I've known of her for a long time, and Jack—I'm so sorry."

"For whom, for me? You're most kind, I'm sure. Still, I'm happy enough, so cease, I beg of you, to waste your pity on me."

He spoke coldly, as if he considered her an intruder.

"Don't talk so to me," she returned, her eyes filling with tears, "if you knew how I've thought and grieved about you. How can you do as you do, when you know you are killing your mother

by inches? And your father, I saw him yesterday—his hair is almost white.”

“I think I am old enough to take care of myself—it isn’t their money I’m living on.”

“Money? What has money to do with it? I know they would willingly give every penny they possess to have you back again in the old way. Have you no regard, no pity for them?”

“Pity? I don’t think they ask pity from me, or did they, indeed, send you to plead with me—to bring the prodigal back to the bosom of his family?”

“Jack, how can you be so unjust? You cannot understand such love as theirs, or you would never talk in this way. Listen: I came here with no other purpose to-day than to ask, to beg, if necessary, this woman to give you up; to go away and never see you again; she’s not your equal in any way.”

He stared at her blankly for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh.

“This is extraordinary,” he exclaimed; “so my parents have actually commissioned you to lead me back to the path of duty? Or else, they have worked upon your sympathies to such an extent that you volunteer to try the experiment

of your own accord? You are all really most kind, in either case, and I thank you sincerely for the interest you still take in me, but I must inform you once and for all, that you are wasting your time and efforts, for I am a hopeless case, I assure you. To start with, I much prefer New York to R.— and so does Pauline. Now, as we expect to be married before many moons, why should I waste my time in such a miserable country hole? You see——”

“Stop,” she cried, laying her hand on his arm. “I swear to you that your father and mother have nothing to do with my coming here—I haven’t spoken to either of them in months.”

“Well?”

“I came of my own free will,” she said. “I came,” and here she flushed painfully, “because I do still take an interest in you, as you say. I came because I believe I still *love* you, and my heart is breaking.”

“You love me?” He repeated her words as if he scarcely understood them.

“Yes, and,” bitterly, “unfortunately you still have the power to wound and hurt me, so be as light upon me as you can, please, for that reason if for no other.”

"I never suspected—" he began.

"No, you never suspected; I didn't myself until lately. I hoped and believed all the old feeling was gone; that it had died when you grew tired of me and left me."

"I never grew tired of you, I——"

But she interrupted him once more, this time a little impatiently.

"Don't seek to excuse yourself by falsehood," she said; "when you left me without a word or a syllable, I existed for months aimlessly, with no ambition for anything. At the mere mention of your name I would tremble, and if I had heard that you were going to marry any one else, I think I should have gone mad. For this reason I kept to myself, and so I heard nothing, until I believed that I had at last outgrown my senseless passion—I even engaged myself to another, but what was the result? One day somebody told me about this—this woman, and I have been miserable ever since. Turn which way I would, I could only think of her, and wonder if you cared for her as you once did for me. They say we women have dogs' natures, and I believe we have, for try as I may, I cannot crush down the feeling I still have for you. I know it is foolish

and unbecoming of me to acknowledge this ; I have been told that your whole heart is wrapped up in her, and yet, I cannot help it. I could not bear to see you marry her ; she is not your equal, and you are certain to repent, when it is too late. Oh, Jack, if it is my fate to care for you, in spite of everything, to be unhappy throughout all the long years which may yet be before me, will not you be generous and sacrifice a little for my sake ? Recollect how dearly you once loved me."

His face softened while she was speaking, and his eyes grew grave and sad.

"Georgie," he said, huskily, as she finished, "this distresses me more than I can tell you. I was brutal to you in the past, and how I ever could have treated you as I did is a mystery, even to myself ; I cannot bear to think of it. I repaid your love with indifference, and your devotion with neglect. I confess it with shame. But I hoped that you would not take it to heart, as it seems you did ; I believed you would soon forget me, though not for a moment did I doubt your sincerity. But you were too good for me, I never was worthy of you, for when she crossed my path I thought no more of you. She fasci-

nated and bewitched me, until now I am unhappy when she is out of my sight. She is cruel and designing, they all tell me, and I know it, and would toss me over like a bad penny, if by so doing she could better herself. She tortures me, and often makes my life a burden to me, and yet the very uncertainty——”

His voice was broken, and his hands sought hers, as if for sympathy. She leaned toward him; he could feel her swift, hot breath on his face. A wild, nameless hope sprang up in her breast; she forgot everything—time, place, circumstances—all, excepting that she was with the man she had loved, that her hand lay in his, and his eyes were looking into hers. The weary months which she had passed were as but a span to her; the days and nights she had spent in weeping were all forgotten. She remembered only that she was sitting by his side, and that perhaps——

“Jack,” she whispered, timidly, “is it too late? Will you leave her and come with me? I will devote my whole life to you, and we will go away together anywhere you like. If you are in need of money I, thank Heaven, have more than enough for us both, and we will begin over again. Only

trust me, and I will make you happy, I know I can."

There was a sound in the outer hall, as of some one coming up stairs, then the rustle of a woman's skirts.

Jack looked uneasily toward the door, and then at Georgie, but she apparently had heard nothing. Then the steps ceased, and presently two voices mingled outside in low conversation, which reassured Jack, and the look of anxiety left his face. The blood was coursing wildly through Georgie's veins, and she listened breathlessly for his answer.

"I cannot give her up. I love her."

She fell back in her seat, with a low moan, at these words; her hope was short-lived and had died a violent death. Humiliation, disappointment, and despair, each in turn, took possession of her.

Suddenly the door burst open and a gay, ringing laugh fell upon their ears. A woman, tall and superbly formed, stood before them.

"A pretty picture, truly," she cried, regarding the pair with snapping eyes. "Did you ever?" she continued, addressing nobody in particular, though Peter had unceremoniously followed her

into the room; "a fine sight to behold in one's own parlor in broad daylight, isn't it? And who, my dear *fiance*, may this fair damsel, who comes to make love to you under my very nose, be?"

Jack, at first taken aback by this unexpected attack, soon regained his presence of mind, and replied to her in a soothing tone:

"My dear Pauline, you should not jump so hastily to conclusions. This young lady is my sister."

Peter, who was suffering tortures for fear Jack would be indiscreet in his reply, inwardly applauded him for his tact. Then, pushing past the indignant Pauline, who was still regarding the two distrustfully, he said to Georgie:

"If you'll permit me I'll take you home."

But Pauline evidently was not quite satisfied with the explanation she had received and was determined to go a little further into details. So to this end she braced herself against the door to prevent Georgie from escaping.

"No, you won't," she said, sulkily, "not until you have rendered a little account of yourself. If you're his sister (which I don't believe), what brought you here, anyhow?"

Georgie opened her lips to speak, but Peter saved her the trouble.

"Stand aside," he cried, imperiously, "or I'll find means to make you, you ill-bred termagant."

There was no mistaking his tone, and she sullenly obeyed him, even though she was in her own house.

"If I were you," he added, with asperity, addressing Jack, who sat silently by with an expression of helpless despair on his face, "I would profit by this unpleasant little experience. Let me give you a tip, will you? If you let her," indicating Mrs. Kirkendale with a wave of his hand, "rule you in this way, she will lead you a merry dance, I can tell you," and without waiting for a reply, he drew the frightened Georgie from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

PETER'S STORY.

"Well, do you feel repaid for the trouble you have taken to secure this interview?" asked Peter, dryly, as the carriage drove off; "you know I warned you——"

"I did not suppose it would be pleasant," replied Georgie, listlessly, "but I hardly expected to find her such a——"

"Demon," finished Peter, quickly; "she certainly is the Old Nick himself when she gets started, and her tongue is endless. She seemed in a fair way to get going this afternoon, only I put a stop to it. Did you notice how she put her hands on her hips, for all the world like a washer-woman? And how those black eyes of hers glittered! I don't envy Jack much. What a blind fool a man in love is!"

"I never saw a more ill-bred person in my life," said Georgie.

"I told you so, you will remember. She is a perfect shrew, and I can't imagine why Jack ever

fancied her. Still, there is no accounting for tastes, you know. She undoubtedly would have pitched into you unmercifully if I hadn't been there to keep her down. But, tell me, was the little chat you had with Jack satisfactory? Did you accomplish your object?"

"I found out all I wanted to know."

"That's good," he answered, cheerily, "and now I hope you'll take my advice in future, and for Heaven's sake promise me not to say anything about this to your aunt."

"You know I won't; she'd be as angry with me for going as at you for taking me. But did you ever meet this Mrs. Kirkendale before? You came into the room with her, didn't you?"

"Yes, I met her on the stairs."

"Then you knew her?"

"Yes, I did meet her once, years ago."

"How?" asked Georgie.

"Oh, it's quite a long story, my dear, and I should have to wade through it all if I told you any," said Peter. "Shall I raise that window for you? It's growing colder."

"Thanks. Please tell me about it, won't you?"

Peter took off his hat to ascertain whether his

piece of gum was safe, and finding that it was, he replaced it carefully upon his head. Then he looked at his watch.

"Say, Peter, tell me how you met her."

"My good little girl, as I told you before, it's a tedious story, and mightn't interest you. Besides, it's late, and I'm very hungry; will you stop now and get dinner?"

"If you'll promise me the story."

"Dear me, how persistent you are. You're bound to hear it, aren't you? Well, all right then, you shall, while we are attending to the wants of the inner man. After all, it will make a good story for the table, I fancy. But here we are at Delmonico's."

The room was unusually crowded, but they managed to get a table at the lower end, which suited them very well. Three or four acquaintances stopped to exchange a few words with them and then passed on, while Peter was leisurely examining the bill of fare. Finally he gave his order to the waiter.

"We are in no hurry; you may take your time," he observed loftily, in French, as the man moved away. "And now, Georgie," he continued, in his mother tongue, "I'll tell you the story

which you are so anxious to hear. But first I must bind you to secrecy."

"Another mystery?" returned Georgie, smiling; "you're full of them, Peter, aren't you?"

"This is something which I wouldn't have get around for the world," he replied, putting great emphasis on the last word, "not for the world; it has never passed my lips yet, and wouldn't do so now, if things hadn't turned out so queerly to-day."

"As you like, then; I pledge myself solemnly, never to repeat a syllable," said Georgie, good-naturedly, "go on."

"Very well then. To begin with, you must know I was only a boy of eighteen when my grandfather died and left me his fortune, and at twenty-one I had entire control of it. Like most young fellows of my age, I was at once seized with a desire to see something of the world, and I did; I went the pace I tell you. I had a box at every theater in town, dressed like a lord, and dined and wined my numerous friends royally."

"I've heard all about that, hundreds of times," declared Georgie, "and how you drove a four-in-

hand with all roan horses. Don't dwell on that part of it."

"You must let me tell it in my own way, or I shall not tell it at all," returned Peter, with dignity. "I like to dwell on those times—they were the happiest days of my life. Let me see, now, where was I? Oh, yes, I remember. Well, to begin again, I took in everything, met everybody worth meeting, and spent my money like water. I often used to wonder what poor old grandfather would say if he could see me; it was enough to make him turn over in his grave, for of all the stingy, pinching old fossils I ever saw, he was the worst, while I—but money was never meant to be hoarded, was it?"

"Certainly not," agreed Georgie, indulgently.

"So I think; so I thought, and I lived like a prince. Of course almost immediately I got in with a set of rapid young fellows, all bent, like myself, upon enjoying themselves, and we went the rounds together. Odd as it may seem, I never cared particularly about drinking, while most of them did, but I was crazy over the theater, and would give up any champagne supper to go to a first night performance. The footlights had a peculiar fascination for me,

though for what reason I can't tell. Perhaps it was because I was kept so close at home, for grandfather would have raised his hands in holy horror at the mere mention of my going to such a wicked place, and yet ever so many of his hard-earned dollars went to buy bouquets for soubrettes and chorus girls. Well, one night four of us went to see a new comic opera, which had been upon the boards for about a week, but which I had not yet seen. The opening chorus seemed stupid enough to me, as it was composed entirely of men, and forty year old 'girls,' but when the star made her appearance, I went wild with enthusiasm."

"Was she so lovely?" asked Georgie.

"She was a dream," he answered, peppering his soup vigorously, "tall and slight, with the blackest hair and eyes I ever saw. And her skin was like milk and roses, even against the trying gown of pink tulle which she wore. She seemed to float upon the stage, rather than walk, and her movements were the perfection of grace. She was the sort of woman to make a man lose his head, and I lost mine on the spot.

"As you may imagine, I immediately hunted up some one who could introduce me to this en-

chantress, and fortunately I managed to come across a fellow who knew her, that very night. I found her, upon close inspection, if anything even more charming than at a distance, her manner being extremely modest, and her conversation simple and girlish. I went home with my brain on fire. In due time I discovered that she was the sole support of her widowed mother, and was living quietly with her in lodgings not far from the theater. I hastened there at the very first opportunity to pay my respects (saying nothing, however, to any of the boys, as I preferred to go alone), and in the meantime continued to send her bushels of flowers. The old lady, to whom I took an instant dislike, eyed me suspiciously, and told me plainly that she did not care about my calling to see Edith (that was her name, Edith Snow), as her daughter couldn't spare the time to receive visits from gentlemen. This didn't discourage me, however, for I contrived to get the object of my affections (I was soon madly in love, you see) to meet me *sub rosa*, and often when her mother supposed she was safe at rehearsal, she was lunching, or driving with me behind my trotters, laughing to think how angry the old dame would be if she only knew.

This went on for about two months, when one day she disappeared, without a word of warning. I was nearly distracted; I inquired for her at the theater and at her boarding-house, but all in vain. She had gone, leaving no trace behind her. I went around like a madman for a week, unable to eat or sleep. I put pathetic personals in all the papers, hoping that some one of them might reach her. But it was of no use; I could get no clew of her.

“At last, one day in spring I went to see one of the men in our office off to Europe, and as I was about to leave the steamer, I suddenly spied her leaning over the rail, looking down at the crowd below. She was in traveling costume, and carried a bunch of roses in her hand. She was going to Europe. My heart sprang up into my throat, and my knees knocked together. I started to rush toward her, but she waved me back. Then, looking cautiously around her, she came forward to meet me.

“I was furious at her for having led me such a chase, and had intended, if I ever found her again, to scold her roundly; but at sight of her my anger vanished, and I could only press her

hand and say over and over how glad I was to see her once more.

“‘Where have you kept yourself all these months?’ I asked, reproachfully; ‘if you knew how I’ve hunted for you.’

“‘Oh, I’ve had such a terrible time,’ she answered. ‘Mamma found out that I used to meet you, and I thought I should never hear the last of it, she was so angry. Then, when I declared I would never give you up, she canceled my engagement at the theater, and took me off to Boston, making me promise never to see or write to you again. And now we are on our way to Paris, where I am to take lessons of Mme. La Grange, a famous singing teacher. I’m so unhappy,’ she continued, her eyes filling with tears, ‘for I hate to go. But how can I help it?’

“‘Of course my indignation knew no bounds. I wanted to go down stairs and give the abominable old hag a large piece of my mind, then and there, but Edith pleaded with me so earnestly that I refrained, though my hands tingled to get at her.

“‘But you won’t go with her,’ I said, ‘after such a display of tyranny on her part, will you? Why, your life would be a burden to you.’

“‘What can I do?’ she repeated, despairingly, ‘you know she is my mother and will take care of me so long as I stay with her, but if I leave her I shall be left to starve, for I can get no engagement to sing at this time of the year.’

“‘You won’t need any,’ I rejoined, gallantly. ‘I love you, and you’ve said you love me. Come with me now, and we’ll get married.’

“She looked frightened, and blushed as she said, timidly: ‘Do you mean it, Peter?’ ‘I never was more serious in my life,’ I replied.

“Then, after a little more blushing and hesitating on her part, she put her hand on my arm, and we walked away together as unconcernedly as if we were not responsible for one person’s going through all the horrors of *mal-de-mer* on the ‘briny deep’ to no purpose.

“‘Where is your mother?’ I asked, as we made our way out of the crowd.

“‘Down stairs, attending to her trunk,’ she answered; ‘she won’t miss me until after the steamer starts.’

“I was thankful for that, as I was not over-anxious to have her shouting at me for trying to kidnap her daughter, and perhaps make me the center of interest on the dock, for even a few

minutes. So I hurried Edith along to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, while I went to make arrangements for our marriage, and by four o'clock we were man and wife."

"So, then, you've actually been married," exclaimed Georgie, "and no one has ever known of it?"

"No, for I guarded the secret jealously, and am sure Edith never knew who any of my relatives were. She understood perfectly that in marrying her I had stooped considerably, and either she was governed by a sense of delicacy or else she was not particularly interested in my family affairs, for she never attempted to pry into them.

"We traveled for a month and then settled down in Baltimore, as Edith fancied that city especially, and I did not care about living in New York with her, for I knew a hundred questions would be certain to be asked if we did."

"And the mother?" inquired Georgie.

"Oh, we sent her a line of explanation, and after that we heard nothing of her for months and months. Whether she raved and tore around the steamer when she became aware of her daughter's disappearance, or whether she took it philosophically, I never heard. But to continue: We lived

in Baltimore for two years. I took a house in the pleasantest part of the city and turned it into the most delightful little home ever occupied by two lovers. I had to run up to New York about once every three months to see how my affairs were getting along, but I always hurried back as fast as I could to my wife and child."

"This is too amusing, Peter," interrupted Georgie, "to think of your being a husband and father without one of us knowing anything about it. No wonder you are so eccentric. But go on."

"Those two years fairly flew by, and at the end of them we found that we had quite an extensive circle of friends. Edith was fond of society, and loved to entertain (which she could do as well as any woman I ever knew), and I was glad to see her enjoy herself. Her voice was exquisite, and as she was always obliging when asked to sing, she soon became very popular.

"She never alluded to her theatrical career, and not one of her new acquaintances even suspected that she had once danced in gauze to the delight of the gilded youth of New York. She seemed as happy as the day was long, and was the pride and delight of my life. Things went swimmingly with us until one day, without a word of warning,

her mother pounced down upon us. I was away when she arrived, and you may picture to yourself my delight upon beholding her waiting to welcome me on my return! I flew into a rage and accused my wife of sending for her during my absence.

“ ‘But she shall not stay,’ I cried; ‘she may pack right up and go back where she came from, the old serpent.’ Then Edith burst into tears and sobbed out that she was her mother, and as such I had no right to insult her. So I calmed down presently, and the upshot of the matter was that the old lady remained. I could find no fault with her, either, for that matter, as she behaved very decently and gave no trouble whatever. But she was no sooner settled in the house than I noticed a change in Edith. From the most obedient of wives, she became willful and headstrong, determined to do exactly as she pleased. She insisted upon receiving and going to see whomsoever she pleased, my wishes in the matter being of no importance whatever. At first I was astonished; then I became enraged, and at last, in sheer desperation went to my mother-in-law to beg her to use her influence with her daughter. She assured me that she would do her best, but

feared her efforts would be of less avail even than mine.

“‘I believe she is possessed of the very devil,’ said I pointedly, and Mrs. Snow solemnly agreed with me.

“One afternoon, about a month after my mother-in-law’s arrival, I saw her slip a letter into my wife’s hand, when she thought I was not looking. I turned hastily, and demanded it.

“‘I gave her no letter,’ asserted Mrs. Snow in an aggrieved tone.

“‘You lie,’ I exclaimed, ‘I saw you with my own eyes.’

“‘Why, how could you?’ asked Edith quickly, ‘your back was turned.’

“‘I know it was,’ I cried, ‘but you forget there is a mirror over the mantel.’

“Both women looked frightened, but still insisted that I was accusing them unjustly. Mrs. Snow flounced from the room in a huff. When we were alone I grasped my wife by the shoulders and again asked for the letter. but she broke from me and ran up stairs. Neither of them appeared at dinner, and so little Pierre and I took it alone together. That night I expressed my opinion of her mother in pretty plain terms to

Edith, ending up with the announcement that either she or I would leave the house.

“‘You’ve been a different woman since she came here,’ I went on, ‘she seems to have an evil influence over you. I never could endure her anyway, as you well know, and now the time has come when she must leave.’

“‘Don’t worry about that,’ retorted Edith, ‘she has no desire to stay where she’s not welcome, and she is going to-morrow morning.’

“And so she did; when I came down to breakfast her place was vacant.

“I was delighted, for I thought we should then have a little peace, but alas! I deceived myself. Things went worse than before, and my troubles began in earnest. Edith became absolutely unmanageable; she took no pains to please me, but on the contrary, seemed to be trying her best to make me miserable, and she succeeded, admirably. We quarreled incessantly, and when she wasn’t calling me hard names or stamping her foot at me, she was sulking by herself. She wrote and received numberless letters, (the contents of which I was never permitted to see), vowing that her mother was her only correspondent. Oh! it was delightful, I assure you! At

last, I could endure it no longer; so one day I told her I would make over the house to her and give her enough to live upon, but that I was going back to New York. I thought if I should go away from her for a while, she might feel ashamed of her conduct, and agree to behave herself. But I was determined to put an end to this cat and dog existence, even if I never saw her again. She saved me all further trouble, however, by taking matters into her own hands, for I had no sooner turned my back, than she sold the house and decamped, taking with her every article of value that she could not dispose of at once."

"Oh," ejaculated Georgie, breathlessly.

"Yes, she skipped off with a good round sum, after sending me a couple of lines, begging me to be kind to Pierre, and forget her as speedily as I could, as she had tired of domestic life, and was going to return to the stage; which instructions I followed to the letter, too."

"Didn't you try to find her?"

"Not much. I nearly broke my neck doing that once before, and I didn't care to repeat the experiment. Oh, no, when she left me this time I saw right through the whole business; I had

been made a dupe of. I, of course, was obliged to retrace my steps, to look after the boy, whom she had sent out in the country in charge of a nurse, and then I came back to New York for the last time, to ruminate at my leisure over the gullibility of youngsters who think they 'know it all.' After the statutory time had elapsed I got a divorce. "Ten o'clock," he exclaimed, interrupting himself, "shall we start? There's plenty of time, but we'll walk a little, if you say so, and I'll smoke a cigar."

CHAPTER XVI.

GEORGIE'S LETTERS.

"The next time I saw her," he resumed, between two puffs, five minutes later, "was in Chicago. She was riding on Michigan avenue with an old fellow, who, I afterward learned, was the manager of a burlesque troupe. She didn't see me, but I got an excellent view of her. She looked mighty well, in her habit, and sat her horse magnificently. She was a little stouter, and a trifle more florid than when I had last had the pleasure of letting my eyes rest upon her, but was still a very attractive woman. She is much too stout, and altogether too florid for my taste now; still some men might make fools of themselves over her, even yet."

"Then you've met her lately?"

Peter started.

"Why, of course," he replied, "no later than this afternoon. Do I speak in parables, my dear? Mrs. Kirkendale and my late wife are one and the same person."

For a short time after this speech there was silence between them. Georgie had had no idea that this was to be the point of his story, and now it struck her like a blow. She did not know whether to be pained or amused, whether to cry or to laugh. She could only marvel dumbly at the mysterious workings of fate.

Finally Peter spoke again.

"It is a thousand pities," said he, sincerely, "that she should have gotten Jack within her clutches, though, for she'll squeeze him as she would a grape, until she can get no more out of him. Then she'll sail off some fine day, and he may die in the gutter for all she'll care. Between her mother and herself, a man must be pretty shrewd to get away with so much as the price of a shave. They certainly believe in making hay while the sun shines, if any two people ever did."

"But the boy, what became of him?"

"Oh, he's all right. I've taken the best of care of him, poor lad; I've had to be mother and father both to him. When he was old enough I sent him to school, and now he is at college, where he's getting along splendidly. Every summer I take him traveling for two or three

months, so in that way he has been almost all over this country, and next year I'm going to show him what there is to be seen on the other side. He's a great comfort to me, that boy, and shall be my constant companion when I bring him home for good."

"How astonished people will be," murmured Georgie.

"Without doubt, just at first, but there are so many odd things happening every day, that their excitement will soon die out."

"Tell me," she asked again, "did she recognize you to-day, after so many years?"

"Why, certainly," he replied, with alacrity, "she's the one who has changed, not I. It's possible I may be a little balder and more dignified-looking than I was then (I hope I am the latter), but otherwise I am about the same as I was when she last saw me. I'm one of those persons who grow old very slowly."

"Mr. Conceit——"

"Oh, yes, I am, I know it. So, you see, she would have no trouble in recognizing me. You should have seen her face when I took off my hat to her; she looked as if she would drop to the earth."

"Did you speak first?"

"Yes, I bowed elegantly, and then I said, as politely as I could, 'How are you, Mrs.,—— I am

not aware of your present name, and I don't flatter myself you have done me the honor to bear mine all these years—but I trust you're well?"

"What did she say? She answered you, of course?"

"Of course, the miserable tramp—I should say she did, although at first she was very much inclined to brush past me (we met on the stairs, you know) without a word. But I told her not to make a fool of herself by putting on any of her airs with me; so she behaved herself after that, and we had quite a pleasant chat outside. Then I asked her if she was married again, and how her mother was, and she asked me to come in and she would tell me all about it. Imagine my surprise at walking in where you and Jack were sitting."

Then there was another pause, of longer duration, and this time it was Georgie who broke the silence.

"Peter," she said suddenly, "when I die I will leave all my money to your son—my cousin."

Peter gave the little hand which rested on his arm an affectionate squeeze.

"Don't," he begged, with mock horror, "for if you do, his estimable mother will manage, by hook or crook, to get it all away from him in less than no time, depend upon it. But you are very

kind, nevertheless, and I thank you in his name and my own."

"It might be arranged, though, so that she couldn't touch it," she pursued, "mightn't it?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but don't let's talk about that now; you have years and years to enjoy it in yourself first, I hope. There will be time enough to think of him when you are the forlorn, spectacled old maid that you threaten to be," he responded, smiling down at her.

"I never said that," she returned, seriously.

"No? I thought you did."

"What I said was that I never should marry, and I don't think I ever shall."

"Pooh; that sounds like such folly. We shall see."

"Yes, we shall see," she echoed.

Mrs. Clarke, who had waited up for them, was dozing in her chair when they came in, but started up guiltily as their voices fell upon her ear.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, apologetically, "I must have actually fallen asleep, as I didn't hear you ring at all; this room is so warm. Come right in, Peter, and have some tea; you, too, Georgie, won't you? No? Then do go on up to your room, as you must be tired, and you need sleep."

"Yes," chimed in Peter, who could never refrain

from giving Mrs. Clarke little pieces of advice on the subject of her beloved charge whenever an occasion offered itself, "I'm sure she's tired—worn out, in fact, with all this dissipation. Really, Mrs. Clarke, if I were you I would put a stop to her sitting up so late nights; it's beginning to tell on her; she scarcely ate a morsel at dinner."

"You don't say so?" she replied, anxiously. "Well, fortunately Lent is here, and she can rest. Girls are so different now from what they were when I was young. Then they used to go to bed at nine o'clock and get up at seven. Now they never think of closing their eyes before midnight or coming down stairs before ten the next morning. I don't see how they ever stand it; it would kill me in a month—like a slow torture. Yet it's the fashion, and they might as well be out of the world as out of style, so they are taught. But for my part, I think it's positively dreadful, and I wonder half of them don't die before their first winter 'out' is over."

"It's all wrong," acquiesced Peter, with a sage shake of his head, "and the good old-fashioned custom was much better for them, as they will find out in the long run. Look at yourself now, for instance; did ever any one see a finer specimen of well preserved womanhood than you are. Perfect health personified, and many a young girl

would give a little finger to possess your complexion."

"Go away with you, you flatterer," retorted Mrs. Clarke, simpering, "you mustn't try to spoil an old lady like me. But really now," bridling, "do you know I was considered a very good-looking woman in my day."

"Of course you were," said Peter, courteously, "you haven't gotten over it yet, either. Ah," with a meaning sigh, "if I were a few years older, and you weren't so devoted to the memory of the late Mr. Clarke——"

"How the boy does talk," she broke in with a vain little smile, "when I'm old enough to be his mother."

"Oh, no; you're not," declared Peter, emphatically, "not by a good deal."

"Indeed I am, quite."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Peter. "You don't look a day over forty."

"Well, I am, a little," she admitted, and then resolved to let well enough alone, and not lay herself open to any closer questioning, she went on, suavely:

"Wouldn't you like to smoke? You can just as well as not, for I always used to sit in the room with poor Frank when he indulged in his evening cigar. You'll find a box in that table drawer."

"Thanks," replied the artful Peter, "I will if

you've no objections—you always have my favorite brand."

"Yes, I got to know a good deal about them during my husband's life; he enjoyed his weed so much. I wasn't fussy about letting him smoke in my parlors, and it was such a comfort to him."

"It must have been," returned Peter, promptly. "Women make a great mistake in being too fastidious—it disgusts men and takes away all the pleasure of home life. It's that sort of thing which drives husbands out of the house to seek places where they can have a little freedom. Now I'll wager Mr. Clarke wasn't a club man," he ventured.

"Well, he occasionally spent an evening out, and I believe he was a member of some club or other," she replied, hesitatingly.

"Of course, of course," assented Peter, hastily, afraid he had 'put his foot in it;' most men do belong to a club at some time or other during their lives. But what I mean is this going out night after night, and staying till all hours."

"Oh, he never did that, mercy! I should hope not. No, Frank was always most attentive."

"So I've understood," remarked Peter. "He must have been a model husband, from all accounts."

"Yes," uttered the widow, "I couldn't find his equal if I traveled the world over. Poor dear

Frank," she continued with a fluttering sigh, "he was so kind, so generous, so——"

"Of course, I'm sure he was a great exception to the general rule," interrupted Peter, hurriedly. He was becoming bored by the conversation, which bade fair to be prolonged indefinitely, so he arose presently and said he must be going.

"Don't be in a hurry," she urged, "but if you *must* go, come over very soon again, won't you? I always like to see you."

He promised and took his departure, after again exhorting Mrs. Clarke to look after her niece.

It was late that night when Mrs. Douglass, the housekeeper, went up stairs. First she had her account books to examine, and as she was rather a poor calculator, she did not finish this until the clock had struck half-past eleven. When she did raise her eyes from her work, she felt positively giddy from the strain, and figures danced upon the walls in front of her for five minutes afterward. She rose from the kitchen table, where she had been sitting, with a yawn of weariness, and a feeling of wrath against the butcher, whose bill was larger this month, than she thought it ought to have been.

"It's remarkable how these tradesmen need watching," she soliloquized as she carefully wiped her pen upon a piece of chamois skin, and put it

away. "They're all alike, and will cheat if they get the chance, as quick as look at you. The idea! the meat bill for this past three weeks is as big as it was last month, and scarcely a soul of company in the house while Miss Georgie was away visitin'. I wonder if he takes me for a natural born fool? I'll lay him out to-morrow when he comes, as sure as my name is Kate Douglass."

Then she put the chairs in their places and gave the fire a final raking; but her troubles were not yet over. Susan, the chambermaid, had gone out again without permission, and Mrs. Douglass was determined to wait up for her.

"I'm just in proper trim to give her a good talking to," she continued, grumblingly. "As if I didn't have enough to 'tend to, without having to set up until morning for *her*, the good-for-nothing little minx. This makes the third time she has done so, too, and it's always her mother who's sick. Mother, indeed; it's probably some follower, she meets. I never ought to have engaged her in the first place, with her meek eyes and red cheeks. Those innocent ones always turn out the most unreliable, and I might have known it. Well, I'm getting paid for my susceptibility to good looks, and I deserve it."

She glanced around in search of some employment with which to while away the time, but

finding nothing, decided to go up to her room and continue her vigil there.

"She'll have to go by my door, when she comes up," she argued, "and I might just as well be improving my mind readin' that last magazine article on 'Every Woman Her Own Dressmaker,' until I hear her creepin' slyly past." And arrayed in a calico bedroom gown, of no particular shape, with a snowy night-cap covering her rather scanty locks, she was soon oblivious to all around her, so deeply interested was she in the suggestions as to how to cut and fit a waist properly. About two hours later she lifted her eyes from her book, and like a flash, her thoughts returned from the region of ribbons and laces, into which they had wandered, for she heard a sound in the hall. It was slight, but distinct, and she was sure it was the delinquent Susan. She drew herself up stiffly, and prepared to pounce down upon her the moment she should appear in sight. Suddenly she heard a short muffled shriek, and a moment later Susan came rushing down the hall with her hat thrown back and her eyes staring.

"Oh, my sakes," she panted, "I never was so scared in all my days!"

"What's the matter, you little gad-about?" asked Mrs. Douglass, severely; putting her sharp spectacled nose out of the door. "You look as if

you had seen a ghost. Are you drunk or crazy?"

"I see a ghost, Mrs. Douglass; indeed I did," returned the girl, with chattering teeth.

"Stop your noise, simpleton—you'll wake the whole house up," commanded Mrs. Douglass; "don't you know there's no such thing as a ghost existing anywhere outside of your own stupid mind? It's your guilty conscience that's troubling you. Any girl who stays out till this time of night must expect to see all kinds of uncanny things. Where have you been?"

"My mother was sick, and I've been with her," she answered, still shivering. "She sent for me."

"Humph! the same old story; well, come to bed, and we'll talk it over in the morning. I'll not put up with such goings-on, I can tell you. Did you put the gas out in the kitchen?"

"Yes, ma'am," meekly. "But as true as I live, Mrs. Douglass, I believe this house is haunted. With my two eyes I saw a woman in white——"

"It was your own reflection in a looking-glass. Come, be off with you now. I want to get a wink of sleep before it's time to get up, if I can."

"I *know* it wasn't a looking-glass, and I can't go to bed this night with that creature, whatever it is, so near me," replied the girl stubbornly.

"Where did you see it?" asked Mrs. Douglass,

with asperity. "Show me the place, and we'll have an end to this tomfoolery."

"It was down the hall in the wing."

"Why, there isn't a soul in the house ever goes into that room, and no one excepting myself knows where the key is."

"Well, somebody is in it now," persisted Susan, "and I know it."

"Come with me, then."

"Oh, no, ma'am—not for worlds," uttered Susan, timidly, drawing back.

"Yes, you will," remarked Mrs. Douglass, firmly, taking her by the arm. "I want to show you what a fool you can be when you want to."

So, much against her will, poor Susan was obliged to accompany the now thoroughly provoked housekeeper down the long hall.

When within a few feet of the room in question, Mrs. Douglass slackened her pace, and even hesitated a little, for she saw that the door was ajar, and a dim light showed through the crack. Ashamed to acknowledge the "strange feeling" which crept over her, however, she took courage and peeped cautiously into the chamber. What she saw caused her to jump back with a little exclamation of fright.

"You see, ma'am," whispered Susan, clutching the older woman's dress nervously, "I was right, and you had better come away."

"Stop your chattering, ninny," exclaimed Mrs. Douglass, stepping in.

It was an old-fashioned chamber, with a high bed in one end, and an oak secretary in the other. There was no fire in it, as the apartment was seldom occupied, unless the rest of the house was over-crowded, and it was as cold as a barn. The lower drawer of the escritoire was opened, and close by, on a foot-stool, stood a lighted candle, which threw its feeble rays upon the upturned face of a white-robed woman stretched motionless upon the floor.

"Don't go in, ma'am, please don't," begged Susan, crossing herself devoutly, as the house-keeper, plucking up her courage, pressed boldly forward.

"Fathers alive!" she exclaimed in terror, when she had hastily scanned the features of the recumbent figure, "it's enough like my dead mistress to be her, but it can't be—no, it *must* be Miss Georgie, and whatever is she doing here? She has fainted, anyway, that's one sure thing, and there's no knowing how long she's been unconscious in this icy room. It's a miracle if she ever gets over it. Susan, get me some water as quick as you can."

But Susan stood staring, open-mouthed, and did not move.

"Run, will you?" cried Mrs. Douglass, impatiently, "there's some in the dining-room."

"Lor', ma'am, I should never dare to go there all in the dark, and the wind whistling like this; I should be scared to death!"

"Well, upon my soul, you're the greatest coward I ever saw," returned Mrs. Douglass, in mingled anger and disgust; "but perhaps you can go as far as my room and get the brandy flask off the washstand, do you think you can, as it's possibly a question of life and death?"

"I'll do that," replied the terrified chambermaid, starting off on her errand.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," observed Mrs. Douglass, tartly, proceeding to rub her young lady's cold hands vigorously, "I didn't know as you'd have the nerve."

Presently she was gratified by seeing the closed lids slowly open, and the pale lips move, but there was no sign of recognition in the dark eyes, nor did the words she spoke contain any meaning.

"Poor darlin' child," muttered the housekeeper, "what is the matter now? Tell your own old Kate, what induced you to come up here in such a dreadful cold place? It's enough to give you your death."

Then her sharp eyes fell upon a bundle of letters, yellow with age and tied with a faded

pink ribbon, lying beside her on the floor. With her quick woman's perception, she instantly concluded that these epistles had something to do with her young lady's present condition; so she snatched them up in a bunch and threw them into the drawer.

By the time Susan returned with the brandy, she had her sitting up, and a few minutes later Georgie had quite recovered consciousness, much to Kate's delight.

"And now, Miss Bravery, you may turn in for the night," remarked the housekeeper to the chambermaid, "unless indeed, you're afraid to sleep alone. But mind you say nothing about this to any one in the morning, or it will cost you your place. I'll take care of Miss Wheatley, and see that she's safely put to bed. Come now, dearie," she continued, affectionately addressing Georgie, "see if you can walk a little, for it won't do to stay here another minute. 'That's right,' as the young girl allowed herself to be led, almost carried to her room. "Now sit in this easy-chair by the fire until I make you a nice warm toddy. It'll bring you around in no time. But don't you *ever* do the like of this again, as it is enough to kill you. Why, I declare, you've got a regular chill. Now, where on earth is that sugar? I'm so flustered, I hardly know what I'm doing."

"There it is behind you on the chair," said Georgie, feebly. "Why," she exclaimed, with surprise, "can that clock be right?"

"Yes, miss, it wants only five minutes to two," answered Mrs. Douglass. "You must have been lyin' there goodness knows how long, and it's a miracle you didn't get your death. Only for that pesterin' Susan, who kept me up nearly all night waitin' for her, you might be there 'till mornin'. 'Twas she spied you first."

"Yes, I know, I went into that room to look over some papers; I thought I would be undisturbed there."

"But where did you find a key to fit the door, Miss Georgie? I didn't know there was but one in the house, the one I have in my bunch."

"Oh, yes, I've had one for a year. I often go in there to write; that old desk just suits me."

"Well, I declare, and me never to know it," exclaimed Mrs. Douglass with astonishment. "Susan saw you in there and came racing to me, screaming that she had seen a ghost."

"Poor Susan! It was too bad to frighten her," uttered Georgie, with a faint smile. "I'm sorry."

"No occasion, I'm sure, miss," returned the housekeeper quickly, "it may teach her a lesson; I hope it will. She had no business to be out at such an hour. It isn't respectable."

"Well, you see, Katie, if she hadn't gone out she would not have discovered me," remarked Georgie.

"True enough, but," protested Kate, "she disobeyed me *flat*, and I can't stand that from any chambermaid."

"You'll let her off this time, though, won't you?"

Mrs. Douglass tossed her head, but made no reply to the question, asked half pleadingly, half authoritatively.

"Do now, that's a good creature," continued Georgie. "Scold her to-morrow, if you think best, but don't send her off. Her fright has been almost punishment enough, I should think."

"Well, I'll keep her, of course, as you say, miss," responded Mrs. Douglass, respectfully, "but I really think she ought to go. Once a girl finds she can pull the wool over your eyes, she'll try to do it again. It's a bad plan to put up with any nonsense from servants, I've discovered. Still," rather resentfully, "as you wish her to stay, stay she must, I suppose." Then, turning abruptly away, she gave her entire attention to the mixture she was preparing, while Georgie leaned back in her chair and watched her languidly.

"Katie," said Georgie, after a pause, "did you ever feel as though you would rather die than

live? As though there was nobody in the whole wide world whom you ever wished to see again?"

"Bless my soul, Miss Georgie, never!" responded the good woman, in consternation; "what a dreadful question!"

"Can you imagine it?"

Katie shook her head solemnly.

"Not unless I had lost my health, and all my friends had gone clean against me," she answered seriously, "but even then it's doubtful whether I would really care about deliberately lying down and dying. There's an awful lot that's pleasant and agreeable in this world, Miss Georgie, and I think we ought to enjoy it as well as we can, if only in gratitude to the Almighty, who put us here."

"But if the Almighty lays burdens upon us so heavy that we can see nothing pleasant in living?"

"We mustn't despair, Miss Georgie. Trials come to all of us at one time or another; but they leave us, too, after awhile, if we're patient under them," returned Mrs. Douglass, reprovingly. "If I might make so bold as to ask, though, I would like to know if anything is grieving you, that you talk so."

"Yes, something is grieving me, Katie, and I shall never get over it."

"Oh, now, Miss Georgie, take heart! You're young, and have so much to be thankful for.

Whatever it is that's troubling you will blow over after a bit, and you'll be as happy as ever."

"Perhaps, but I don't think so. I haven't a hope in life," returned Georgie, in a tone of conviction. "There were some letters up-stairs," she continued; "did you see them?"

"Yes, miss, I tumbled them all into the drawer of the desk. I thought maybe you had been reading something sad, and that had affected you. So I put them out of sight."

"Get them for me, won't you? Be particular to bring them all."

"If you tell me to, of course, Miss Georgie; but I am afraid they will make you ill again," remonstrated Mrs. Douglass.

"No, I don't want to read them; I'm going to destroy them."

"Very well, but you will drink this now? It's piping hot."

"Afterward. I want the letters first. Make haste, please."

So Katie obediently went for the letters and laid them on her lap. Georgie rose and threw them into the fire, one by one, watching them with compressed lips as they burned.

"See the flames devour them!" she exclaimed; "they seem to enjoy it, don't they? Think what a waste of time and paper that was, Katie, for those letters never brought anything but misery;

they were written lies, base lies. Here, give me the poker, so that I can make them burn faster. Ah, that's something like a blaze; they can never do any more mischief, never break any more hearts, can they?" and she accentuated every other word with a blow from the poker, laughing with wild, unnatural gayety as the paper wilted under the heat.

"Lor', Miss Georgie," cried Katie, alarmed at the strangeness of her behavior, "don't do so," coaxingly, "or you'll make yourself sick again. Take this, now, and come to bed, that's a dear, and I'll cover you up like I did when you were a child, and you'll be quite yourself in a little while. Come, I'm waiting."

But even as she spoke, Georgie reeled and fell back in a swoon, and by morning she was raving in delirium.

CHAPTER XVII.

WILY MRS. THORNE.

Mrs. Thorne was "not at home." To begin with, she had spent an almost sleepless night, full of terrible dreams and melancholy thoughts, and she had counted every hour after four o'clock. At eight, thoroughly exhausted, she had rung for Annette, and told her to prepare a tepid bath, well sprinkled with *eau de cologne*. After a brisk rubbing, she had felt decidedly better, and had eaten her breakfast with some appetite. But she was still far from well, and she had declined to see any one who called, and spent most of the morning dozing on the lounge. At noon, however, her dressmaker had begged so earnestly for a few moments' speech with her, that Joseph, who knew from experience that Mrs. Thorne seldom denied herself to mademoiselle, had made the mistake of allowing her to go up stairs. But alas! this person's visit, although short, had left Mrs. Thorne in a more wretched state than before. She had not come to fit on a new gown, or even to talk one over, with her fair customer. On the contrary, it was only that morning she

had heard, for the first time, of Mr. Thorne's failure, and she had lost no time in running around to find out whether she was going to lose the money which madam owed her. She soon discovered that it was probable she would, and she had thereupon given vent to a torrent of abuse, which had so frightened Mrs. Thorne that she went into a fit of hysterics on the spot. Annette had come speedily to the rescue, and ordered Joseph to put the infuriated woman out of the house, which he did, but not until she had shaken her fist in Mrs. Thorne's face, and vowed vengeance upon her. Then the maid had administered an opiate, and left her to herself. Late in the afternoon she tiptoed softly in again, and, finding her mistress still calmly sleeping, started to go away again, when suddenly Mrs. Thorne awoke with a start.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Nearly six, madam," replied the maid. "Are you better now? and will you dress?"

"Yes. Is Mr. Thorne at home?"

"No, madam, he leave word he will not be at home until late to-night."

"Very well. Then I'll dine up stairs, as I don't feel like going down, until I have to."

"Does madam expect company this evening?" asked the girl, respectfully, as she dropped the window curtains, and lit the gas.

"I don't know. Some one may come. I'll put on my black velvet, anyway, as I'm tired of lying around in this wrapper."

"That was a severe shock to madam's nerves," continued Annette, as she proceeded with Mrs. Thorne's toilet. "Joseph say he had great trouble with mademoiselle in the hall; she try to break something, and scream like she was mad."

"It was frightful," responded Mrs. Thorne, with a shudder; "I never saw such a demon in my life. I thought she was going to kill me, the way she flourished that umbrella. If you hadn't come in just then, I don't know what I should have done. The insolent beast! when I've paid her so many thousands of dollars. It makes my blood boil to think of the way she insulted me! How I would like to be able to pay her back! Did you hear her say that she wished I'd die a pauper? Just wait until I get the opportunity (if I ever do) to get even with her, and see how quickly I'll take advantage of it."

"But madam would not lower herself so much, and she must recollect, too, that mademoiselle had some reason to be angry," interposed Annette, soothingly.

"Yes, I would," retorted her mistress, hotly, "I'd order half a dozen expensive dresses from her establishment, and when they were finished and sent home, I'd return them to her with a

curt note saying that they weren't satisfactory. Wouldn't she dance?" And she laughed a little at the thought.

"But madam," expostulated Annette.

"Madam would like nothing better," returned Mrs. Thorne, mimicking the girl's horrified tone "The only pathetic part of it is, that she's not likely to get the chance, for some time yet, at any rate."

When dinner was ready her spirits seemed to revive. She laughed and joked with Annette, who waited upon her, and even went so far as to insist upon her joining her, at dessert, saying that she hated to dine alone. She ate but little, and smoked Turkish cigarettes until the room was almost uninhabitable.

The door-bell rang twice before nine o'clock, and each time she started up with a little nervous exclamation. Once it was a boy with a bundle, and the second time a note for Mr. Thorne.

At a quarter past nine it rang again, and this time Joseph appeared with Lee's card on a tray. Her heart gave a joyful bound, and she executed a little *pas seul* in front of the mirror, as the man turned his back. But she recovered her dignity again, directly, and ran to the bureau to take a final look at herself before going down stairs.

It was only then that she began to realize what a strain she had been under for the past

few days; how anxiously she had looked forward to this visit. The note she had received from him in answer to the crushing one which she had sent, had been short and concise, merely saying he would "call on Thursday night, if possible." She had awaited him in fear and trembling, conjecturing what he would do in the interim; whether he would fly at once to Georgie, and demand an explanation, or sit at home and brood over his heartless dismissal. Knowing his proud nature, she had thought the latter course the more probable, and upon that she had pinned her hope. But what if he had gone to Georgie, and discovering the treachery which had been practiced upon him, had come now to confront her with his proofs? This thought gave her a momentary return of nervousness, but she smothered it and summoning a smile to her lips, she went to meet him.

Her first glance at him told her that she had nothing to fear; that he had no suspicion whatever, and her confidence rapidly returned. His face was white and haggard; it was evident that he had come to seek comfort, not to accuse. So she boldly pursued the course she had marked out for herself.

"I'm so glad to see you," she murmured, "I didn't know but what you had deserted me. It seems an age since—since I left New York."

"Yes," he replied, "I would have come before, only I've been unusually busy. Sooner or later, though," he continued with a short, hard laugh, "I was bound to turn up."

"I want to tell you how much, how *very* much," she began, modestly dropping her eyes, "I regret my indiscretion that night; I can never forgive myself, *never*. But I *do* hope you will try and forget it, and——"

"Pray don't mention it my dear girl," interrupted Lee, "we were all in for a good time, you know." Then, as if anxious to change the topic of conversation, he went on: "I can't begin to tell you how shocked and grieved I was to hear of Charlie's bad luck. It was so unexpected, so sudden. I never was more dumfounded in my life."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Thorne, sighing, "it was a terrible blow—especially to me, who never dreamed but that his affairs were in a prosperous condition. I had no suspicion that anything was wrong, until that night when he called me into the library and told me, in the most brutal fashion, that we were beggars, or nearly so. Can you imagine my feelings? I cried all night; I couldn't help it. The thought of leaving this house where I've spent so many happy hours, and the world where I've been such a power, nearly broke my heart, at first." And she

choked down a sob that rose in her throat. "But now I do not feel so badly about it, I've tried very hard to get used to the idea of giving it all up," she continued, with a sad little smile, "and I really think I've become quite brave."

"Poor little woman," said Lee, feelingly, "indeed you *are* brave. To tell the truth, I had half expected to find you in tears to-night; you certainly bear your misfortune like a heroine. But have patience; Charley will come out all right in the end—he's not the first man who has made a mistake, and he's young yet. I sent him a note to-night saying that he could draw on me for any amount he chose until he's on his feet again."

"Really, Lee, you are too good," uttered Mrs. Thorne, warmly, "and no one but you would suggest such a thing. But at the same time, I trust, I *believe*, he is man enough to refuse your offer. His liabilities are enormous, and he would leave you pretty well crippled if he took advantage of your kindness. No, he has brought himself to this strait by his greed, and now let him extricate himself as well as he can."

"But you—you should not be made to suffer for his folly."

"Oh, I shall get along well enough, I suppose. It isn't a pleasant prospect I have before me, to be sure; but still I've had such a long day that I mustn't complain. If he were only a little more

sympathetic, though, I don't think I would mind it so much. But you know what he is; he has no more soul than a block of granite, and I dread to think what my future life may be with him. How thankful I should be if I could go away alone, and never see him again! But I can't do that; he's my husband, and my proper place is at his side. People would have a right to scorn me if I deserted him now. No, I must stay and try to do my duty by him, even though he has failed sometimes in his to me."

"Upon my word, Ray, you surprise me," exclaimed Lee, admiringly. "I didn't think you had so much pluck. On my honor, I didn't. Well, misfortune shows what we are made of. But listen: You know perfectly well that Charley will come up again before long, he's such a lucky dog, and then you'll be all right. But in the meantime, why don't you let me help him a little? It's only a loan, you understand, and I can easily spare him all he needs."

She shook her head decidedly.

"No," she replied, "I'd never forgive him if he accepted aid from you, of all men; so please don't suggest such a thing to me. I only wish you hadn't written to him."

"Perhaps he hasn't received my letter yet," said Lee. "I didn't send it until eight o'clock. I wrote it at the club just after dinner."

"Did you direct it here?"

"Yes."

"Then he hasn't seen it yet, for he hasn't been home since morning. Thank heaven! Will you give me permission to destroy it?"

"Certainly, as you feel so strongly about it. Of course, I don't wish to force my services upon you."

"I'm ever so much obliged. And now remember, please, Lee, that I appreciate your kindness more than I can tell you, only——"

"I understand. But there's one favor I wish you would grant me."

"Anything, *mon cher*, what is it?" asked Ray, more brightly.

"Well, as you say, I know how close Charley is by nature, and it's only reasonable to expect that he won't be any more generous with you in the immediate future, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid it is," answered Ray, dolorously.

"Then," proceeded Lee quickly, "you will let me make *you* a little loan, will you now? You can pay it back you know, when you are able, if you must, but I really wish you'd do this for me. You can account for it to your husband in any way you think best, or don't account for it at all. You have always been more than kind to me, and I should hate to think of your longing for any of those little luxuries women prize so

highly, and to which you are so accustomed. If I had any respect for Charley, I would never think of making you such a proposition, but I haven't; I consider him a lout and a cad who is not fit to be married to a decent woman. So you won't refuse me?"

She shook her head again, this time with a mournful smile.

"I must, she murmured, "but nevertheless, I will acknowledge that your offer is a great temptation to me. Please," pleadingly, "if you have any regard for me, say nothing more on this subject. It pains me to say no to you when you're so good, and yet I cannot say yes. Besides, she continued, in a low voice, "you must recollect that there is another whose wishes ought to be consulted in matters of this kind."

He turned his head away and a sort of spasm seemed to run through his huge, powerful frame. When he spoke again his lips were quivering.

"There is no one whose wishes I have any reason to consult," he said in a husky voice.

Ray opened her eyes as if in astonishment.

"And Georgie?" she uttered, inquiringly.

"It is all over between us."

"Why, Lee——"

"Yes, he went on rapidly, "the letter you sent me from her, contained my *conge*—nothing more or less."

"But what reason did she give?"

"None; you may read the note yourself. I brought it to show you." And with hands that trembled, he took it from his wallet and handed it to her.

She read it calmly, placidly, without betraying herself by so much as the quiver of an eyelid, although she was possessed with a frantic desire to laugh aloud.

"My poor Lee!" she simply said when she had finished.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“WHY WRITE SUCH A NOTE?”

Man-like, seeing that his companion's eyes were fixed upon him with tender sympathy, he hastened to unburden himself to her without reserve.

I have always noticed this difference between men and women: that the latter, when they have been badly treated, will almost always seek to hide their wounds, especially from their inmates, while the former, who are naturally supposed to have so much better control of themselves, will, under the same circumstances, in nine cases out of ten, run to unbosom themselves to their “best friends,” even to the extent of becoming a bore. However, I will give this credit to the sterner sex, they seldom give a wrong coloring to their stories, and usually tell things as they really happen; while women——

But I am digressing.

“What can be the matter with her?” he exclaimed in a ringing tone; “what is the reason of this sudden change in her feelings toward me? To think of her kicking me off in this way, without a word of explanation! When I first got

this note, I thought I would take the next train to R—— and ask her what it meant, but on a little reflection, I decided that it was beneath me to go where I was particularly requested not to, and then, too, she might refuse to see me. So I staid at home. *Ray*, why did she write me such a note? Do you know?"

"Indeed, I don't, Lee," she responded, with a puzzled air. "I am utterly bewildered at your news. She was as pleasant and as cheerful the day we parted, as I have ever seen her. She came to my room to kiss me good-by just after lunch, and said, 'here is a note which I wish you would give Lee as soon as you get home. It will reach him sooner than if I sent it by post.'" Of course I thought it was just a little love letter, or something of the sort, but I never dreamed it was anything like this. How could she be so cruel, and above all so foolish as to throw you over so? Oh, well, I wouldn't mourn over her if I were you—she doesn't deserve it. Any woman who would do as she has done, isn't worth a pinch of salt. Of course I'm surprised, yes, amazed that she should have treated you so, and yet I half expected she would toss you off in the end. You know this Jack——"

"Why, do you think he has anything to do with it?" Lee broke in anxiously. "You your-

self assured me that she no longer cared anything about him."

"So she swore to me. But, you see, when she saw him again, the old influence made itself felt, I suppose, and no doubt she yielded to it. Georgie is a strange girl anyway; she's been a continual surprise to me, and I fancy she is to herself. To be frank with you, Lee, as I told you before, I don't think she ever loved you properly. In New York she always had people running in and out, or else she was off herself, and I have good reason to suspect," dropping her voice to almost a whisper, "though of course I wouldn't *dare* to say so, to any one but you, that she used to meet Jack somewhere."

Lee's face worked with his emotion.

"Then I've been taken in like a fifteen-year-old schoolboy, haven't I?" he exclaimed, harshly, "to amuse her. What a woman she is! One can hardly help admiring her sublime audacity."

"You are rich and of importance," observed Ray, insinuatingly.

"And she wanted to make use of my money and position, no doubt, while she continued to meet this fellow in secret. "What an ass I've been! I might have known how this would turn out from the beginning. I can understand very readily that his presence might affect her, always, to a certain extent, but that she could

deliberately throw me over and go back to him, after promising herself to me, I *cannot* understand. Ah, well, live and learn."

Ray laid her cool soft fingers upon his wrist.

"Let her go," she urged, "after a while you'll forget her and life will once more be pleasant to you, and the sooner you put her out of your mind, the better it will be for you. Let her have Jack, and marry him if she likes. As for me, I will never speak to her again—I couldn't, after her heartlessness to you. Then, when we are settled in our humble new home, you will come and see us occasionally, will you not?"

He recovered himself, with an effort, and took both her hands in his.

"Come to see you?" he repeated. "Of course I will, and will be only too glad of the opportunity, God bless you! Let me say right here, though, before we drop the subject forever, if another girl, no matter if she be even as attractive as Helen herself, causes me the loss of an hour's sleep, I will give up all my worldly possessions the following day, and become an outcast. I've done with love and all thoughts of matrimony. I wouldn't undergo such suffering as I have gone through the past few days, for any consideration. I feel ten years older."

She pressed his hands warmly, in reply.

"And now," he resumed, looking earnestly

down into her face, "you will gratify me about this money, will you not? I really wish you would; the knowledge that I am doing something to make somebody else a little less miserable, may help me forget my own unhappiness, perhaps."

Ray returned his glance with a long, grateful one.

"*Nous verrons*," she replied, lightly.

* * * * *

Late the next afternoon, Mrs. Thorne appeared at Lee Grant's private office. She was plainly dressed in gray, with a heavy veil drawn across her face, and she had come on foot every step of the way. She started timidly at her own footfalls, as she passed quickly down the silent, dimly lighted hall, and her heart beat so wildly when she reached the door, that her limbs nearly gave way from under her. She was about to play her last card, and what if she should lose, after all? She was trembling so that she could scarcely knock, and glad enough she was that John (Mr. Grant's man) delayed two or three minutes before opening to her. He did not recognize her, and looked at her rather doubtfully. But when she gave her name he was profuse in his apologies.

"Beg pardon mum, beg pardon, I'm sure," he exclaimed, as he ushered her in; "you see it's allus that dark out here this time o'day, I often make mistakes, and then your vail—but step right in mum, and I'll call Mr. Grant; he's busy packin' inside. I'll run and tell him you're here."

"Packing?" she repeated, in dismay.

"Yis, mum," you know he's goin' away Saturday. It's quite sudden like. Indade, it's only this morning that he tould me a word about it."

"Where is he going?"

"To Europe, it is, mum," replied John, wondering at her agitated manner.

Mrs. Thorne waited to hear no more. Scarcely knowing what she did, she pushed past him and soon found herself in a sort of writing-room actually littered with books, fishing tackle, and guns, in the midst of which sat Lee examining the trigger of a large revolver. He looked up as she entered, and flushed a little, as if with annoyance.

"Why, Ray, you here? But I hope you'll excuse the condition of affairs just at present," he said, disencumbering a chair and pushing it toward her. "I'm rather upset, as you see, but the fact is, I'm going away."

"So I hear," she answered, without noticing

the proffered seat, "John told me so just now. He says you're going to Europe."

"Yes, I'm going on Saturday."

"Isn't this rather sudden? You said nothing about it, yesterday."

"I did not make up my mind to go until last evening. I met Billy Waldron at dinner, and after talking a little with him, decided suddenly to follow him. You know he sailed to-day."

"And when are you coming back?"

"I don't know; I'm thinking something of taking in India while I'm about it, for the shooting. I'll send you the first tiger skin I capture. All despairing lovers say that nowadays."

She did not answer; she scarcely heard the last two sentences; she felt as if the ground was slipping from under her feet.

He picked up another revolver and looked it over carefully before placing it in its case.

"Truth is, Ray," he began again, hesitatingly, "I'm so broken up about the way she behaved toward me, that I think a change will do me good. I cannot *bear* to stay here and see her married to another fellow, just yet. I can neither eat nor sleep, and am not myself at all, so I'm going away, and when I come back it will all be over and too late to mourn."

She was trembling from head to foot, and her eyes were swimming in tears, but he did not ob-

serve it. Suddenly she threw out her arms with a gesture of despair, and cried.

"Take me with you, Lee! I cannot stay here!"

"I would be glad to do so if it were possible," he replied, kindly.

"It is possible, Lee," she went on excitedly, "this afternoon my husband put me out of the house."

"Put you out of the house?" he repeated, mechanically. "I don't understand."

"Yes, he turned me out of the house, but not until he had struck me."

Lee dropped the revolver.

"And in heaven's name what made him do it? the confounded brute!" he exclaimed.

"We were having a dispute just after luncheon about our expenses, and I think he felt he was getting rather the worst of it, so, like the coward that he is, he flew into a passion—and his temper is simply awful when it gets the best of him—and swore at me. Of course I resented this and called him a tyrant. Then he turned and struck me on the cheek. Look," raising her vail and showing an ugly red mark.

"The infernal hound!" cried Lee, "he deserves to have his head knocked off."

"After that he pointed to the door, and told me to go and never come back. So what could I do? I took him at his word, and came to you, for,

knowing how I sympathized with you in your trouble, I did not see how you could turn a deaf ear to me. And now," plaintively, "you are going away, and I do not know what to do. Mamma cannot take care of me, she has barely enough to support herself upon, and she would try to make me return to him. But I cannot, I cannot—I will never put my foot inside of his door again," and she burst into tears.

"Surely something can be done about it," asserted Lee, "you would have no difficulty in obtaining a divorce."

"I have no money," she rejoined, tearfully, "and besides, I don't want my name dragged through the courts. I only want to go away out of all this misery. Oh, Lee," clasping her hands, and looking at him imploringly, "if you have any pity, take me with you."

"That is out of the question," he uttered, promptly. "Think of the consequences; think how your name would be tossed about. It would be a thousand times worse than a divorce. Charley is the one who would be sympathized with, then, and I would be pointed out as a scoundrel."

"We need never come back to this country."

"My dear girl, you don't know what you are talking about," said Lee, impatiently. "If I were to let you come with me, I would never dare to look any of my fellow-countrymen in the face

again. You are excited and don't know what you are saying."

Ray bit her lips until the blood almost came, "I never was more collected in my life," she remarked calmly, "and I fully appreciate what I am saying. I am asking you to take me away where I will have peace and quiet, to any place you are going, even if it's to the jungles of India. You will not regret it, Lee, I promise you. I am no child that I do not understand the meaning of what I ask. Let me go with you and I will be as true and faithful as a dog. Leave me behind, and I will not answer for myself. If *your* life is ruined, what is mine?"

He made no reply.

"As for you," she continued, "why should you care what people may say? Have you not had a sorrow which drives you away out of the reach of the gossips? And what is your trouble, compared with mine? Homeless, friendless, poor—how can I face this merciless world? Have pity on me, Lee, and take me with you."

He folded his arms and lowered his eyes.

"If money would aid you, I would give you half I possess," he remarked, slowly.

"Money?" retorted Ray, scornfully, "good heavens! all you men think of is the dollar; you seem to believe that woman can go into a store and purchase happiness by the pound. No; what

I want is sympathy, companionship, and some one to protect me. This is what I ask of you, and you will not, you *cannot* refuse me. I will be no trouble to you."

She had laid her hand on his arm while speaking, and was looking up in his face with her very soul in her eyes.

"I don't know what to say," he muttered, in a bewildered way, as if speaking to himself. I——"

"You will never have reason to regret it," she murmured; "I shall never reproach you, whatever happens. If you tire of me I will leave you, but all my life I will bless you for your goodness to me."

"My goodness," he echoed, with a short laugh, "it could hardly be called that, I think."

"You will take me?" she pursued, breathlessly.

"Listen," he said, after a pause. "I do not say no to you. I suppose I ought to, but I feel so reckless, so indifferent to everything just now, that I don't much care what happens; so you see you have attacked me at the right moment. If you insist upon accompanying me, you may do so, and we will take our chances together. The steamer sails at noon, you know, so be there on time with your luggage. If you change your mind between now and Saturday, send a note down instead, and it will be all the same."

She seized his hand and covered it with kisses.

"Heaven bless you!" she cried, and a moment later she was gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEE AND RAY IN NAPLES.

It was late afternoon in Naples. The sun, slowly sinking in the west, touched with lingering tenderness the snowy mountain peaks and the bright blue waters of the bay, as though loth to leave so lovely a spot.

The city, with its white buildings stretched in long curved lines along the shore, one above the other, formed a rest for the eye wearied with gazing upon the beauties of nature displayed on every side. Monasteries and houses, separated from each other by a succession of finely kept gardens and vineyards, looked down from their proud elevations upon the matchless panorama spread out beneath them. While above all Vesuvius, with its crown of living flame, glowed with a faint, yellowish light, as the rays of the departing sun fell upon it.

A lady was reclining on a low chair on the balcony of one of the most charming villas just outside of the city. Her bright hair rippled over her head in perfect harmony with the lilac gown with its front of priceless lace which she wore. Her waist was encircled by a broad antique girdle studded with jewels, and a heavy bracelet of similar design clasped one fair round arm.

She was ostensibly occupied with a book, the latest American novel, but every few minutes she put it down to share a bon-bon with the little dog lying in her lap. Occasionally she walked to the edge of the balcony, and shading her eyes with her hand looked out over the water, not anxiously, but as though she were expecting some one. Then she would turn and gaze in another direction, down along the path below, gently winding itself in and out around the verdure-covered rocks until it was hidden from sight by a neighboring orange grove.

She was dimpled and rosy, with a forehead as unwrinkled as a child's.

Presently a footman, bearing a tray upon which were several letters, appeared at one of the long open windows. She took them and looked them carefully over. Finding two addressed to herself she sat down once more to read them, placing the others on a table at her elbow. Both bore American postmarks, and were in feminine handwriting.

"This is from mamma," she murmured, breaking the seal of one of them. "I wonder if it will be any more amiable than her last? It begins a little more affectionately. Poor mamma, she is breaking her heart because my social triumphs are at an end." She glanced hastily through it, and was about to take up the second one when a sound on the gravel below attracted her attention. A man on a large English horse was riding slowly up the road. She pulled the bell rope, and after ordering the servant to tell his master where he would find her, she took up her letter again. As she neared the end of the second page her face suddenly blanched, and a low exclamation broke from her. But she recovered herself immediately and smilingly held out her hand to the tall, bronzed man who had joined her a few moments later.

He looked very handsome as he sat there on the balustrade, with the light of the dying day falling softly on his face and head with its thick brown hair. The dark corduroy jacket he wore was extremely becoming to him, and she thought, with a throb of satisfaction, what a splendid, big, manly fellow he was.

"What kept you so long?" she asked. "I was beginning to be worried. I thought you might have gone sailing in that abominable little boat

of yours again, or else that 'Monseigneur' had been up to his old tricks."

"Oh, no, I haven't been on the water to-day, and I imagine that new bit has taught 'Seignie' a lesson or two," he answered. "He's as quiet as a lamb. I'm later than usual because I met those two Scotchmen we ran across so many times in Paris, McDonald and Graham; you remember them, don't you? They are traveling with their wives and are 'doing' Italy. They say they detest guides, and get along without them whenever they can, so they asked me what there was to see in Naples. 'Vesuvius,' said I. 'What else?' asked McDonald. 'The Museum.' 'What then?' inquired Graham. 'The Bay,' I answered. 'But have you no churches, no picture-galleries to go through?' they asked in a breath. I told them no, thank Heaven we hadn't, but that the fishing was excellent. They seemed quite disgusted, and said they hardly thought it paid to stop here. But they wanted to go through the Museum, and insisted upon my accompanying them. So I went. And now they are anxious to have us join them on an excursion to Pompeii, some day this week. What do you say, shall we go? They're rather nice, you know."

"If you like; I suppose I can stand seeing it again, although I am getting rather sick of it."

"So am I. In fact, I think I'm getting sick of all this part of the country."

"Already? Why, how restless you are, Lee! We haven't been settled a month yet, and now you want to leave."

"Don't you find it monotonous?"

"No, indeed. I think it's the most delightful spot on earth to live in, and look at the scenery. What could be finer?"

"One wearies of scenery after a while. I'm beginning to long to get where my own language is spoken, and to leave these noisy Italians who talk with their hands and feet, as well as their tongues."

"But when we were in London you said you wanted to go where you could have perfect rest, and not hear the incessant chatter of Americans and English people. Don't you remember the time you pretended you were deaf, so as not to be bored with that fussy little Dr. Rush, in Liverpool?"

Lee flicked his boot with his riding-whip, and did not answer, except by a nod.

"And we're so comfortable here, too," she pursued, "the servants are so satisfactory, and the house I'm sure, is simply perfect."

"Well, Ray, if you're satisfied, I suppose it's unkind of me to want to take you away. No doubt I'm one of those unhappy mortals who

would find fault with paradise, and after all, perhaps I'm better off here than anywhere, if it is a little dull. We'll stay then."

"Not if you wish to leave, Lee," returned Ray. "Speak the word, and we'll be off to-morrow."

"No, we'll wait a little longer, and go to Paris or Vienna, later on, where you can get some clothes, for I don't suppose you can find anything here to suit you. Apropos, I bought that fan you wanted, to-day. I gave it to Annette."

"How good you are!"

"Nonsense, if I can only give you a little pleasure to compensate, in part."

His voice sank almost to a whisper, and a look of care came into his eyes. She went over to him and laid her arms around his neck.

"Pleasure?" she repeated tenderly, "why Lee I never imagined, even in my wildest moments, that I could know such happiness as I have experienced during the last few months. It has been like one long delicious dream. Every night when I go to bed, I pray that it may last, and that I may not awake with a start and find myself back *there* again. Sometimes when I stand out here alone in the moonlight and see all around me so bright and unreal, I cry for very joy. If I have given you a tenth part of the happiness that you have given me, I am content."

Twilight was fast approaching, and the water was now of a dark purplish hue. The mountains reflecting the last tints of the fading light, stood boldly out against the darkening evening sky.

Lee took the little face, nestling so close to him, between his palms, and kissed it reverently.

"You've been a blessing and a great comfort to me, Ray," he said, "and I don't know what I should have done without you. Often when I've been quick and impatient with you, you have been like an angel. But you understand me, do you not?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

"I try to be even with you, upon my honor I do, Ray, but like all men, I have my morose moments, when I feel as if I couldn't speak a civil word to any one, as if I just wanted to be left alone to think. And you, poor little woman, generally get the full benefit of my bad temper."

"I told you I would never complain."

"And you've kept your word."

"Because I'm constantly thinking of you," she continued, and wondering what I can do to please you. When you are away from me, even for the afternoon, as you were to-day, I try to follow you all the time with my thoughts, and I count the hours until you are back. Lee," in a still lower tone, "do you care for me, *so?*"

He was silent a moment, then he answered:

"It was understood that there was to be no mention of love between us."

"I know, but I'm so happy that I cannot help asking if you are too. Let me put the question in a different way. Have you quite forgotten her?"

"Why do you bring up these subjects, Ray, when you know how I dislike to talk on them? We are both contented now, so don't let us refer to anything which is likely to make discord between us. You are sweet and kind to me, and I don't ask anything more. I try to live only in the present. The past was a failure, and the future—well, I never think of that."

"You would not change anything if you could?" she pursued.

"No!" he replied, almost harshly. He had half turned from her and his eyes were fixed upon the distant crater which was growing brighter steadily. She disengaged herself from him and went back to her chair.

For a minute or two there was a silence between them, broken only by the low sobbing of the water on the shore.

"Come here, dear."

It was Ray who spoke, and she motioned him to a seat at her feet.

"There is something I want to tell you," she went on, "and which I have been trying to tell

you for weeks, but I haven't had the courage, until to-night. It's very hard for me, but my mind will never be at rest until I do. Besides, it's your right to know it."

"Yes?" He said this quietly, as though he had little interest in what she was saying.

She seemed to struggle with herself for a moment, and then resumed:

"You know that note I sent you from Georgie, the one I told you she gave me in New York——"

He sprang to his feet impatiently.

"Why will you keep bringing that up?" he cried.

"Because," she answered steadily, she "never sent it to you."

"She never sent it to me?" he repeated in a dazed fashion.

"No, she sent it to *me*."

"Explain yourself."

"I will, if you'll give me a chance. Sit down please, and listen to what I have to say, if you don't you may never hear it, as I'm not often in a repentant mood. Perhaps I'm making a fool of myself now, but I'm going on at any rate, for the sake of my own conscience. Of course you remember how foolishly I behaved at the dinner that night at Mount St. Vincent, and how the absinthe affected my light, unaccustomed head? No need of dwelling on that, is there? Well, it

seems my indiscretion disgusted your matter-of-fact little fiancée, for the next morning, bright and early, she took her departure, *sans mot dire*, leaving me only a scrubby little note. So I, having nothing else to do, followed suit and returned to Philadelphia."

"Well?"

"As soon as I got home, I was summoned to the library by my husband, and informed of his recent failure. Pleasant welcome, wasn't it? This was a little too much for my equilibrium, coming as it did, right on top of the other, so in spite of myself I had to give way to my feelings (up stairs though), which were a mixture of wrath against the world in general, and pure, unalloyed sorrow, for myself. As for Georgie, I felt that I *hated* her with all my might."

"I can't see how this concerns me."

"Have a little patience and you'll see that it *does* concern you. As I say, I went to my room, where nobody's eyes excepting Annette's could pry upon my moanings and groanings, and she didn't count. By the way, you don't know what a treasure that girl is? I really think she's a mascot, or else an imp in disguise. The devil usually does assume the female form when he appears on earth, doesn't he?"

"What has Annette to do with your story?"

“Very much. You recollect I said she was the only witness of my grief that unlucky day—excepting Bijou, of course,” bending over to kiss the top of the little animal’s silky head. “She was unpacking my trunk and putting my clothes away. After awhile she came to me with a letter she had found in one of the trays and asked me if I wanted it. I looked at it and found it was the one Georgie had left on my cushion. I had tossed it into my bureau drawer that morning. I read it over again, and suddenly the idea occurred to me now I might use it to advantage.

CHAPTER XX.

"YOU SHALL NEVER SEE ME AGAIN."

"That's the reason why I say I believe Annette is an agent of his Satanic Majesty. If she hadn't given me the letter, such a wicked idea would never had entered my innocent little pate. The thought which came to me was this: 'Why not send this letter to Lee? it is as applicable to his case as to mine, and will help me wonderfully in future, if it doesn't ruin me.' I knew the risk was a great one, but I had so little to lose and so much to gain that I decided to take it. So it went to you in proper shape, as you know. I was awfully frightened at first, and *did* feel a little badly on your account. I hated to make you suffer, but I had no pity for her; she had treated me pig-gishly, and I was glad to get the opportunity of returning the compliment. Besides, I argued to myself, she is rich, young, and has life before her, while I felt that my day was about over. She had everything, and undoubtedly was still fond of Jack. I had nothing, and begrudged her only *you*. You know how well my plan succeeded—beyond my fondest hopes. Everything ended satisfactorily, and here we are to-day."

While she was talking a change had come over Lee's face. He had grown deadly white, and his eyes were scintillating dangerously. Now he took a step toward her and clutched her wrists in his hands.

"You dared to do this!" he hissed.

"I dared to do anything then," she declared, coolly. "All is 'fair in love and war,' you must bear in mind, and I was in desperate distress. What's the difference? We are both all right now, aren't we? And avowedly happy."

"Wretch! fiend! do you suppose I shall stay with you after this?"

"And why not?"

"I loathe and despise you!"

"A moment ago you declared you couldn't get along without me. Ah, my dear fellow, you mustn't be so hard on me. What I did was wrong, undoubtedly very wrong; I have confessed it, but after all it was natural. Loads of women situated as I was would have acted as I did, on the impulse of the moment, if they had the courage."

"Not unless they were as black-hearted as you are," he returned harshly. "Listen: you just asked me if I loved you. I will tell you now—no, I do *not* love you, and never did. She was the only woman I ever loved, and ever can love."

"Indeed? You came with me, like a little lamb, nevertheless," retorted Ray.

"I must have been mad when I listened to you, and anyway God knows I believed—oh, heaven! how could you be so false?"

"Pray don't let us have any private theatricals, *mon cher!* The way you're glaring at me positively frightens me; I'm afraid you may throw me off the balcony. Cool down, and pull yourself together."

A silence fell between them.

"Of course, after this you understand we must part," said he, at last, in a voice so changed that she looked up, startled.

"So you suggested; but why? I should not suppose your tender conscience would admit of your doing me such an injustice. Besides, where should I go? I cannot go back to my husband, as mamma tells me he is reduced to a mere eating and drinking machine and is constantly at the race-track, betting every cent he can scrape together. Besides, he seems perfectly contented without me, and even jokes about my disappearance, when he's had a glass too much. And you—what country are you thinking of exploring, *mon inquiet?* You surely would not return to America, would you?"

He nodded.

"And run the risk of Charley's shooting you?"

"I've no fear of him, and I must and shall see her."

"'Must is for the king, and shall is for the queen,'" quoted Ray, lightly. "And to tell you the truth, I don't believe your trip would be very satisfactory."

"At least I shall have the satisfaction of an explanation."

"And expose me? Really, Lee, that would be most ungrateful of you, and I know you will not do it."

"I shall leave here to-morrow morning."

"So soon? *Sapristi!* And I have enjoyed your society so much. But I suppose all happiness must have an end sometime, or it would become *ennui*. However, I don't think you will be in such hot haste when you've seen this letter from Grace Burton. She's been in London for three months, and thinks I am traveling for my health with Annette."

He snatched it from her fiercely, and went to the window with it. The lamps inside were burning, and a flood of light came through the curtains.

This is what he read:

"Just after you went away Georgie Wheatley was taken very ill with brain fever. For weeks she lay between life and death, but at last she began to get better. She convalesced rapidly, and even went around the house a little. One day, however, just when everybody thought she was almost well enough to get out, she had a relapse.

They called in four doctors, I hear, who simply devoted themselves to her ; but they could do very little. She regained her strength so slowly that Mrs. Clarke almost died of despair, and worse than all, as her body improved, they discovered that her mind was gone and they could give no hope of its recovery. They say that her principle hallucination is that Peter Persuade is married and has a son.

"By the way, I must not forget to mention that Jack Nelson has married the widow, and his parents absolutely refuse to recognize her. Too bad, isn't it?"

The letter fell from his hands and he turned sharply away with a choking sob.

The sound of a bell from a distant monastery, ringing for vespers, came softly over the water. It was followed by one nearer by. The waves sighed and moaned below.

The sight of his grief and the solemnity of the hour stirred whatever womanliness there was in Ray's character. Impulsive always, she sprang toward him and threw herself at his feet, bursting into a passion of tears.

"Oh, don't look so grieved, so heart-broken," she cried, "and forgive me if you can. I did not mean to bring misery to any one when I acted so selfishly. I only thought of my own happiness, and now I am repaid for my wickedness, in trying to alleviate it by such means as I did. Listen: I may have done wrong in leaving home, in forcing

myself upon you when you were so unwilling; but it is God's truth that I never have lived so good a life and had so much respect for myself as I have in the past few months, since I was married. You were kind and gentle to me, Lee; I appreciated it. In fact, it was because my conscience, so long dumb, was troubling me for keeping anything from you that I confessed all this afternoon. I thought you would pardon me. And so you would have, had you loved me. But you don't and never can care for me as I would wish you to, and that fact would blur all my future. So I see myself that it is better we should part. Only do not leave *me*. Let me be the one to go. Make that one little concession to my pride, and then I promise you shall never see me again. Have just a little patience, darling, and you shall never know another regret on my account."

With these words she turned from him and disappeared into the house, leaving him alone with the glorious Italian night and his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FUTURE WHICH IS SO FULL OF HOPE.

October is generally considered to be one of the loveliest months of the year, and the day of which I am writing, was a typical "golden day." The sun shone brightly, the birds sang sweetly, and the wind blew gently—so gently as to scarcely stir the short, fluffy locks of a beautiful girl, seated in a comfortable garden chair under a tree, in a country place on the Hudson. She was well wrapped up, in spite of the balminess of the air, and a second glance would convince you that care would not be taken amiss with her, for she was very pale and delicate looking. In her hands she held a dainty piece of embroidery, but I am afraid this morning it got but little attention, as her eyes were bent far oftener upon the man who lay full length at her feet.

Presently he spoke.

"Are you sure you are warm enough?" he said. "I beg of you, do not expose yourself to the least danger. Just think if I were to lose you *now*."

"Not much fear, I imagine," she replied. "I am really quite well, and it seems absurd for me to be so careful of myself. I never knew how

nice it was to be of so much importance before. But," laughingly, "do you know I rather like dictating to people, and having my slightest wish, law."

"Thank Heaven, you can express your wishes. Oh, Georgie, if you could only understand my feelings the night they told me you had recognized and asked for me."

"All before that seems like some ugly dream," returned Georgie, with a little shiver. "But from the time I was told you were in the house I felt so different. And Lee," very gravely, "are you sure now that I can make you happy? It may be years before I shall be strong, and your patience will probably be tried very often."

"Can you not trust me, my dearest? The delight of my life will be in seeing you improve day by day, and month by month. Ah, sweetheart, when one has suffered as I have, one learns to value peace and love."

"We have both suffered," she said, softly, "and through each other, though with no fault on the part of either. No," as he started to speak, "not a word, 'all is forgiven and forgotten,' as they say in books. But let us not dwell upon that miserable time; let us cast dull care to the winds, and enjoy our youth while we can. By the by, did you order the ponies for this afternoon? You know Peter and his son will be here on the two

o'clock train from the city, and I wish to be at the station to welcome them. Only think how strange it was, that I, in my delirium, should have been the first to announce that young man's existence to the world in general, and really, I have gotten exceedingly fond of him. He was so attentive to me from the moment he reached home, and insisted upon carrying me up and down stairs as soon as I could be moved."

"But how did you prevail upon Peter to send for him?"

"I don't know. But I rather think just about then, I could have had Barnum's circus, if I had demanded it. Everyone seemed so anxious to please and gratify me; old Peter especially so. So, when I begged him to send for Pierre, he arrived duly, and from that time I began to mend."

"If I only could have been with you!"

"You were too busy making yourself agreeable to my worst enemy," retorted Georgie, archly. Then, as a look of pain came into his face, "forgive me," she said, "I did not intend to refer to that. But now, since we are on the subject, tell me once more about that last night, won't you?"

"And then do you promise never to bring up the subject again?"

"Yes."

"Well," taking her hand in his, "after she left

me on the balcony I think I must have stood there for hours, suffering such torture of mind as I had not believed it in my power to endure. They told me dinner was waiting, but I scarcely heard them. A man wished to see me on business, but I did not even answer. At last a clock struck eleven, and I started up, deciding to go to bed for a few hours' rest.

"Just at that moment Annette rushed out, wringing her hands, and uttering all sorts of exclamations in her native tongue. I asked her what the matter was, but as she was too excited to speak English, and I never could converse in French, I seemed in a fair way to remain in ignorance, until I had forced a little brandy down her throat.

"Then she managed to gasp out her story. She said that her mistress had not gone to dinner and had even refused the slight refreshment she had brought to her room, thinking she might be hungry later on.

"About ten o'clock she had gone into her boudoir to prepare her for bed, but she was not there. She went away and returned in half an hour, but still she did not appear. Then, thinking she might perhaps be ill, the girl rapped on her bedroom door. No answer. She turned the knob and went in, to find the chamber in perfect order, but vacant. Knowing that her mistress

seldom went down stairs at night after going to her room, and remembering her hysterical manner upon entering it, she was thoroughly frightened, but she said nothing to anyone. Glancing hastily around for a clue to her disappearance, she discovered that a heavy Spanish lace shawl was missing from its usual place. Then, guided by her instinct, the faithful creature left the house and followed the path which her mistress generally took when she walked. Half way down to the water's edge she found her handkerchief, and a little farther on, her slipper. Frantic with apprehension then, she flew back to the house to me.

"I did not, could not, believe Ray had committed suicide, and so I tried to pacify the weeping girl. But it was no use. She knew madam was not feeling like herself all the evening; something serious had happened. Of course I immediately ordered all the men out, and joined in the search myself, but it was in vain; we could not find her that night. The next morning I offered a reward for news of her dead or alive, and a few days afterward her body was brought to me by a couple of fishermen, who had come across it miles down the coast."

"Poor Ray!" murmured Georgie, shuddering.

"Yes, poor girl!" said Lee; "a dreadful ending for so brilliant a woman. And yet, knowing her,

one could hardly be very much surprised. A slave always to her own caprices, life had no longer any charm for her when she was denied the means of gratifying them."

"Sin usually finds us out, doesn't it, Lee?" asked Georgie, tritely.

"So they tell us, dearest, and we will try to enjoy our happiness, even if it was purchased at her expense. Her cruelty to us was something incredible.

"Still I shall always cast a thought toward that lonely grave, and feel the deepest sorrow on her account, even in my gayest moments," said Georgie, with a far-away look in her eyes.

Lee kissed her tenderly.

"Cheer up, little girl," he replied; "let the past go, and try to live only in the present and future—the present which is so full of joy for us, the future which is so full of hope."

"And now, darling, when I plead for an early date for our marriage, you will not demand six months to prepare your mind and wardrobe, will you?" asked Lee, with a change of tone.

"No," she replied, smiling, "nor six weeks. I can get everything I want in a very little while."

"So much the better," uttered Lee, with a look of gratitude, "and please to remember that you cannot name a day too early to suit me, as I really feel as if I were growing very old. But come,

there is Mrs. Clarke. I suppose luncheon is ready. Shall I carry in your wraps?"

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUIET WEDDING.

On the outskirts of a little village overlooking one of the most picturesque parts of the Hudson stands a church. It is small, of rough-hewn stone, and from an architectural point of view possesses, perhaps, not a single point of beauty. It is situated at the base of a hill, and is approached by two roads, one almost directly from the top of the ascension and the other from the village beyond. In winter it is a gloomy enough location; the wind whistles through the tall chestnut-trees and moans itself away in the valley below, or, assuming a frolicsome mood, lifts and tosses the snow about, heaping it in grave-like mounds all along the footpath.

To be pitied, indeed, is the belated pedestrian who must take his lonely way in this direction, for weird, blood-curdling tales are told concerning it. Goblins and witches still hold their sway over the untutored rustic minds, and stories of the Headless Horseman, narrated by a credulous witness, to this day seldom fail to cause teeth to chatter and a closer huddling around the genial hickory fires.

But in summer or fall there is no lovelier place on earth. The trees heavy with fruit, the fields of ripening grain stretching for acres like a yellow sea, the tiny brook singing as it hurries along over moss and pebbles, the glimpses of silver water through the thick foliage, and the old church, with its ivy-covered sides, make it a spot worthy of a painter's brush.

And it was here that Georgie and Lee decided to plight their troth.

Not many people were asked to the ceremony, only the immediate relatives of both, and a few friends, as neither of them liked display, and for many reasons, they thought it best that the wedding should be as quiet as possible.

It was by far the most important event which had ever taken place in that locality, and so, long before the appointed time the villagers began to gather around the door and to line the road on both sides.

At Mrs. Clarke's especial request, a florist from New York had been sent for to decorate the church, and the result was most satisfactory.

Promptly at five o'clock the music, which consisted of a band of stringed instruments concealed in a bower of roses, struck their first notes, and shortly afterward the guests began to arrive.

First came the village school children, headed by their teachers, who walked in with the dignity

becoming their importance; they were followed by such of the townspeople as had been honored by invitations, the guests from New York who had come by special train, and the party from High Park.

Peter Persuade, faultlessly attired as usual, came rocking up the aisle escorting Mrs. Clarke, who was resplendent in jetted lace and diamonds.

Mrs. Templeton, smiling and gay, entered with Pierre Persuade, a handsome young fellow in cadet uniform, while her grumpy old husband was assigned to Mrs. Wheatley.

At last every eye was turned toward the door, and the bride entered leaning upon the arm of her Uncle Henry. Very fair and sweet she appeared, in her shimmering satin and old lace. She was enveloped in tulle from head to foot, and as she laid her hand in that of her future husband she looked more like an angel than a woman, the country people declared.

Just as the newly married couple turned to come down the altar steps, the setting sun, which had been hidden in the clouds all day, burst forth in all his glory, shining full upon Georgie's face, which was considered by the simple folks, an excellent augury for the future.

The house party was a small but merry one, and the congratulations and good wishes bestowed upon Mr. and Mrs. Grant were very hearty.

Mrs. Clarke shed a few tears as her niece came down stairs and prepared for her journey, it seemed so hard to part with her; but she dried her eyes when Peter told her that weeping at weddings was entirely out of date, and exceedingly bad form.

Everybody, servants included, came out into the piazza to throw handfuls of rice and old slippers after the bride and groom as the carriage drove off.

As they reached the Park gates Georgie leaned out of the window and kissed her hand. Then the horses made a sharp turn and they were lost to sight in a bend of the road.

THE END.

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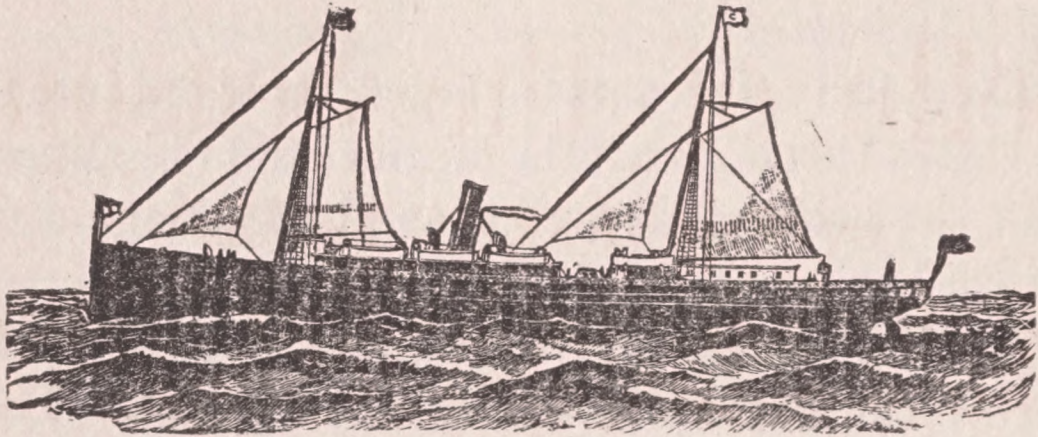
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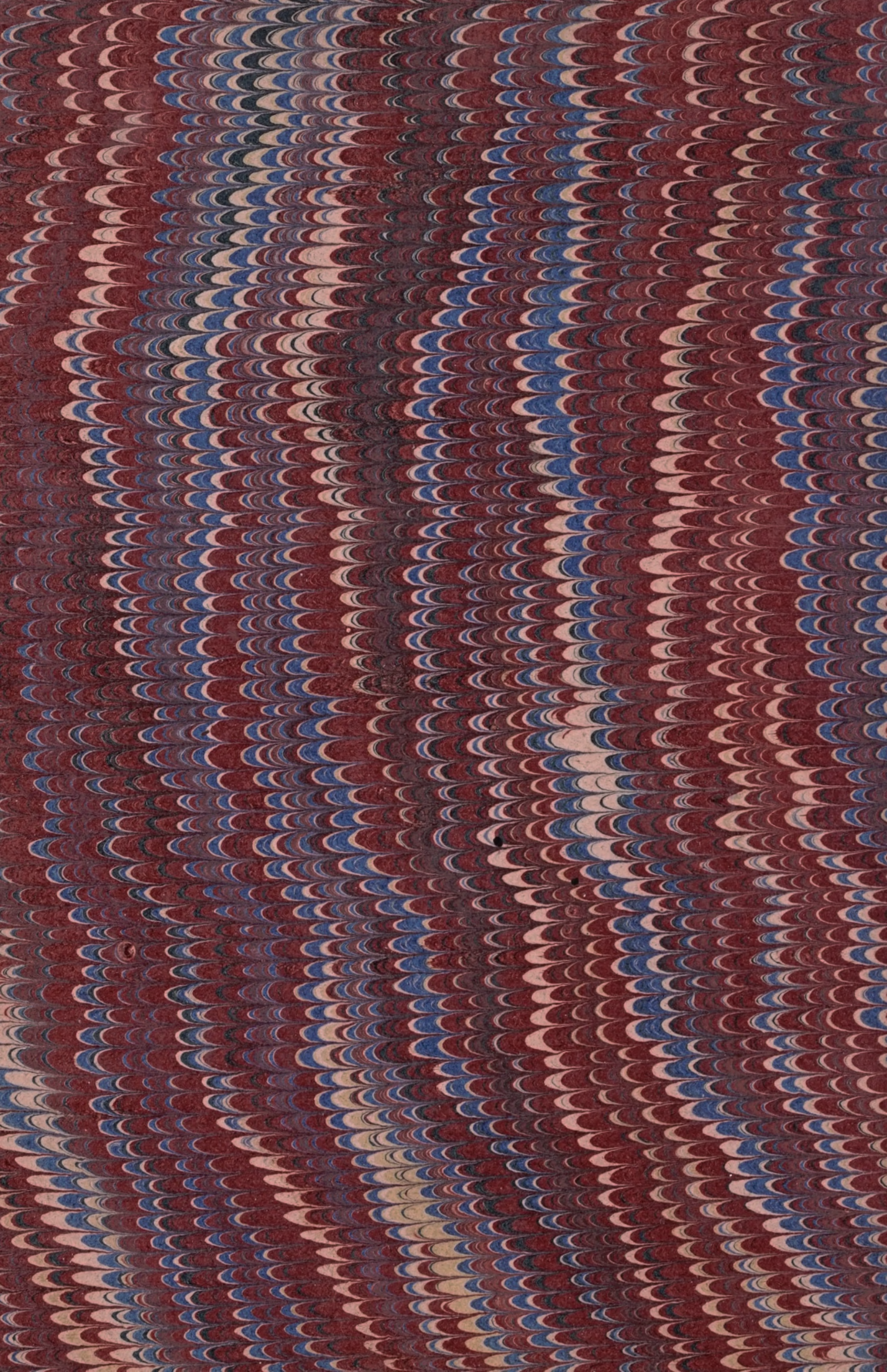
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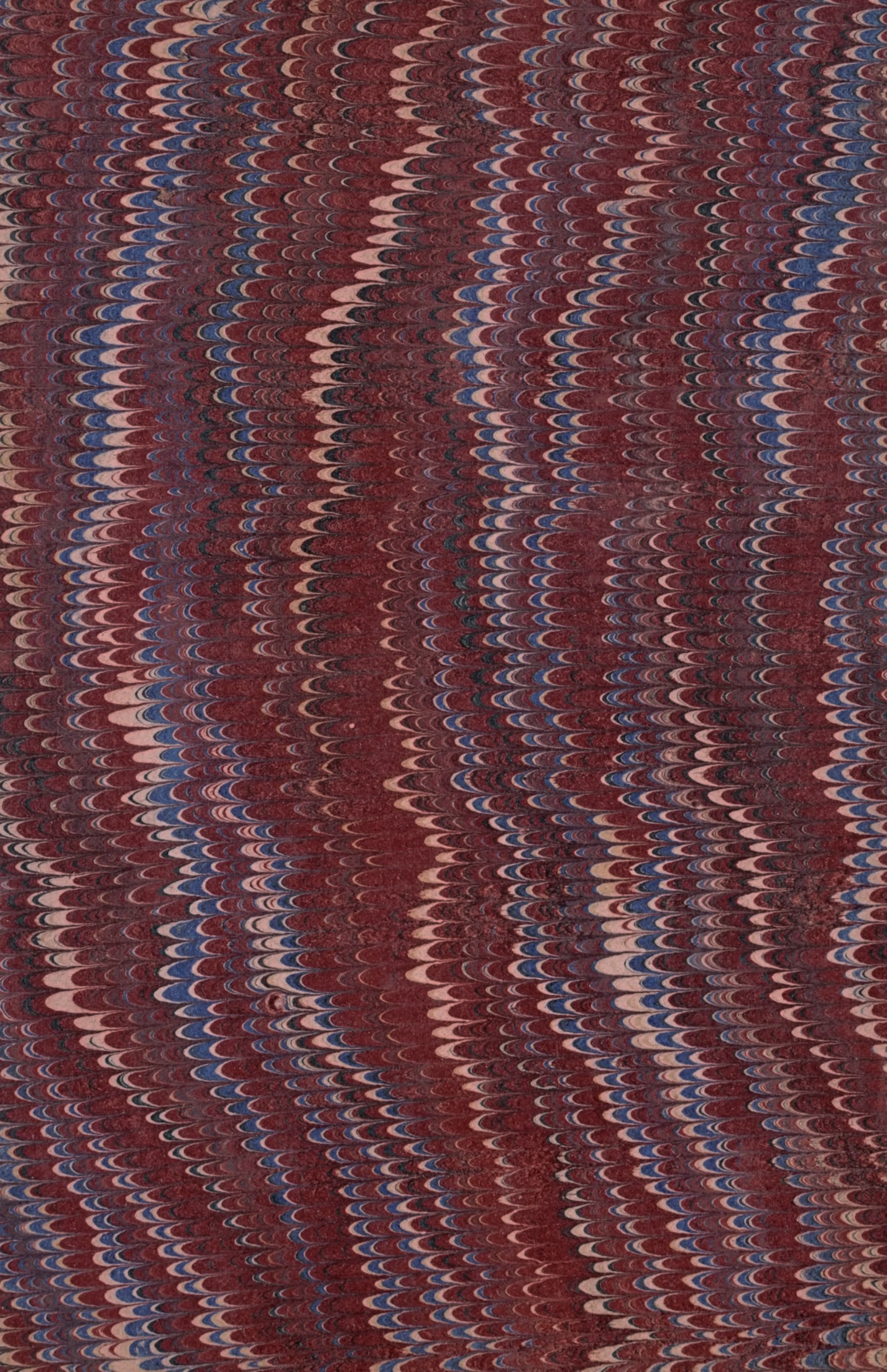
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